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lifestyle close-up

Portable DVD Players

Portable DVD players are great for just about everyone, from jet-setting professionals to kids on long road trips. And the industry reflects that attractiveness: There are dozens and dozens of models to choose from. But what kind will fit you and your family's lifestyle? We'll give you shopping tips, size and weight guidelines, and examples of the latest technology to make your portable DVD player a solid and entertaining investment.

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Size Does Matter

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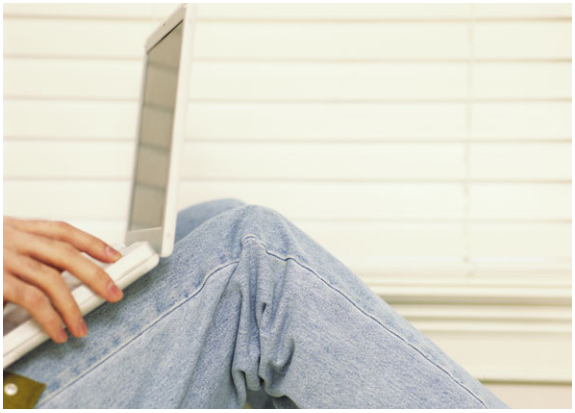
Progressive Scan



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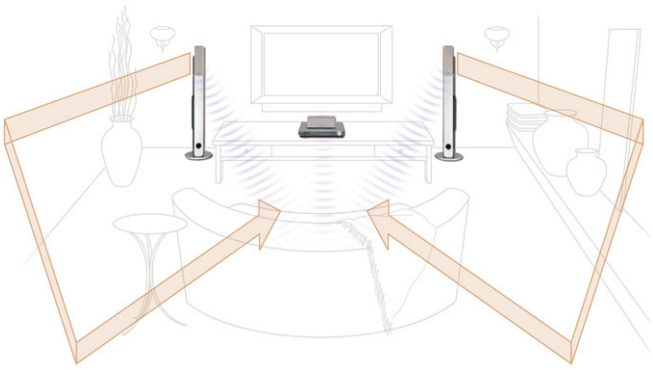

Digital Studio

Digital cameras and camcorders are changing the way we record the moments of our lives, from quick snapshots of favorite vacation spots to priceless video clips of first steps and other important milestones. Get to know your new digicam or camcorder and learn what to do with your photos and video once you have them.

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Speakers should be heard, not seen.
That's why we put them in the screen.

Three speakers integrated into the frame, two surround sound speakers and a subwoofer complete the system.

Introducing the Da-Lite Acoustical Imager

Designed for your decor and engineered for your senses. This revolutionary home theater system combines the clarity of a fixed Da-Lite screen with the harmony of a JBL 5.1 audio surround sound system. The Da-Lite Acoustical Imager is simple to set up. The left, right and center speakers are integrated into the screen's frame. The compact surround sound speakers bring up the rear while the subwoofer delivers the bass for a truly remarkable home theater experience. Choose between a Video or an HDTV screen. Available in eight projection surfaces. Or have Da-Lite custom build a screen for your home theater.

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CE @Home

The consumer electronics in our homes are no longer limited to TVs and DVD players. Smart appliances, home automation, and whole-house audio systems are becoming more and more common and affordable for families, and with so much available, why check CE at the door?

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CE Lite

Most CE devices are all about fun. Here, we'll tell you about the latest albums and films to catch, so you can make sure your entertainment is as up-to-date as your gear. And so as not to forget our roots, "Retroscope" traces how a favorite CE device has changed over the years.

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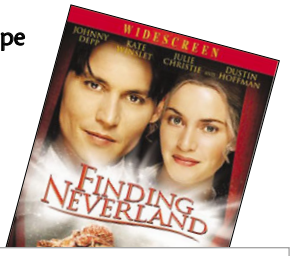

Editor's Note

Whether we admit it or not, the perfect look is important to most things in our lives. And not just the look; I mean The Look. That aura that's emanated when something is the most attractive and most fashionable it can be, universally appealing and singularly eye-catching. From our homes to our handbags, we want The Look.

The consumer electronics industry has indeed caught on, creating hip and streamlined home-theater speakers and designer laptop bags fit for Carrie Bradshaw. Many manufacturers have also started creating CE devices that are not only good-looking, but they are also unobtrusive and visually take a back seat in our day-to-day lives. For instance, in this issue (on page 24), we cover virtual surround sound, a technology where two speakers trick your brain into thinking there are six or more, which eliminates the clutter and mess that one risks with the wires and cables of conventional home-theater systems. Manufacturers know that modern women want The Look, while simultaneously striving to incorporate the latest technology into their homes and everyday lifestyles.

The Look is exceptionally important to us here at *CE Lifestyles*, not only in terms of the products and technologies we feature, but also in how we feature them. You'll notice a few visual changes this issue, ones that we think reflect what our readers want to see in all areas of their lives: functional, contemporary, quality-driven products and ideas presented fashionably and attractively, pleasing both our eyes and our minds. That's what we want out of a new suede ottoman; it goes without saying that it's what we want out of our digital cameras.

Live well, friends.

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ce news

Compiled by Tracy Baker

More Efficient iPods

If you have yet to jump on the iPod bandwagon, you may want to wait until the model you most desire incorporates PortalPlayer's PP5022 System-On-Chip (www.portalplayer.com). PortalPlayer's products are the brains that let iPods play music and work all of their other tricks (including displaying information on the device's screen), and the company claims its latest hardware is so efficient that previous iPod models that incorporate the new technology may have up to three times the battery life of past models. PortalPlayer accomplished this by reducing the amount of electricity the PP5022 needs to function, including dramatic reductions in the power requirements for battery-eating system memory. The iPod's processor must work hard to decode digital audio for playback, which draws a lot of power from the battery, but the PP5022 makes the decoding process more efficient, letting the processor do its work at lower overall speeds to conserve even more battery life.

If you're curious about real-world performance compared to the company's claims, look no further than the latest version of the iPod mini, with its maximum claimed battery life of 18 hours. That's more than twice the battery life of the original model, thanks mainly to the PP5022.

Courtesy of Apple

PEBL Adds A Little Estrogen To The Cell Phone Market

Motorola's PEBL V6 sports curves that would make a supermodel jealous, but Motorola is being tight-lipped about the specifications of its latest must-have cell phone. We know it's designed so you can easily open it with just one hand and it supports Motorola's EDGE technology for accessing data at relatively high speeds. That will be nice because the phone has an integrated camera that takes still images or captures full-motion video, which are stored in the 5MB of integrated memory. The PEBL supports Bluetooth to wirelessly connect the phone to headsets or other products that use that popular wireless networking standard, and you can configure your phone to automatically grab weather reports, headlines, and other vital information so you can access it at a glance.

Adidas Announces High-Tech Running Shoe For The Well-Heeled

Courtesy of Adidas

CE has finally hit the road—literally—with the announcement of the Adidas 1 ($250; www.adidas.com). That's a lot of cash for a pair of running shoes, but you're also paying for computers, sensors, and other technology hidden in each shoe that take readings 1,000 times per second and dynamically adjust the stiffness of the heel based on what you're doing. When you're walking, for instance, the system powers off to conserve battery life, but when you're running, the computers spring to life, adjusting the tension in a cable to make the heel more or less stiff, depending on how much shock the sensors measure each time your shoe hits the pavement. Adidas claims the battery that powers this system operates for 100 hours before it needs replacing, and unfortunately, it isn't rechargeable.

Yourself!Fitness Hits The PS2

Forget all of those kids fighting fat by gyrating to the tunes of Dance Dance Revolution. The rest of us can now use our consoles to get fit with responDESIGN's Yourself!Fitness ($34.99; www.yourselffitness.com). Released last October for the Xbox and PC, this personal-trainer-in-a-box is now available to the millions of PlayStation 2 owners out there. Load it up and Maya, the virtual trainer, walks you through a health assessment and tailors exercises to your fitness level and overall health goals. You don't need any extra equipment if you want to do the aerobics routines, but you can use instructions for hand weights, step, and other exercises if you have them and want to take it to the next level. When you get sick of sweating it out, there's even a complete yoga routine to help you wind down.

Sounds Great, But Where Are The Speakers?

No home theater is complete without a surround-sound system, but who wants those unsightly speakers and wires messing up the look of your otherwise perfect living room? Onkyo's tasteful CB-SP1200 ($600; www.onkyousa.com) integrates 40-watt front left, center, and right speakers into a sleek and functional TV stand. The left and right speakers each have separate woofers (low- and mid-range audio speakers) and tweeters (high-range audio speakers) for more accurate sound output across a variety of frequencies. Most surround-sound tracks concentrate most of the sound—including all-important dialogue—into the front-center speaker, and the one incorporated into this stand has a tweeter surrounded by two woofers to handle all of that sound.

The speakers are covered by a black grille designed to blend into the surrounding wood, which is hand-rubbed with seven coats of black lacquer. The stand supports up to 250 pounds and is 17 inches high x 47 inches wide x 17-3/4 inches deep to accommodate a variety of TVs. The speaker jacks are on the back of the stand so you can connect the speakers without crawling around on the floor behind an entertainment center. All of the speakers are magnetically shielded, so they won't interfere with TVs. You may remember when speakers interfered with CRTs (cathode-ray tubes) and the picture became distorted from the magnetic field.

marketplace

Market research firm Gartner claims that total mobile phone sales climbed 30% in 2004 compared to 2005, with more than 674 million cell phones flying off the shelves worldwide. Nokia is still the No. 1 manufacturer by a long shot, commanding more market share than No. 2 Motorola and No. 3 Samsung combined. Gartner predicts that more than 730 million cell phones will be sold in 2005.

Worldwide Mobile Terminal Sales To End-Users In 2004

MOBILE TERMINAL SALES

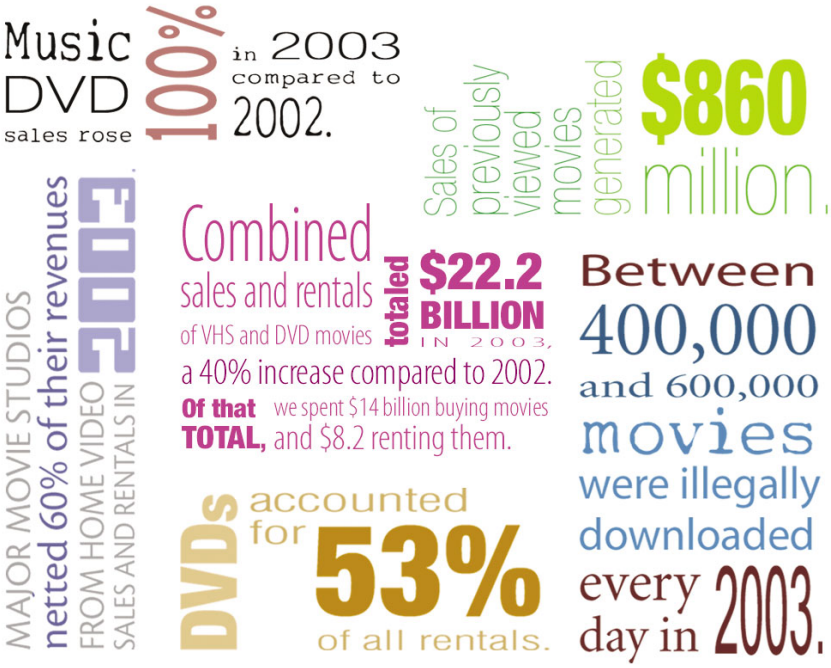
Company	2004 Sales	2004 Market Share (%)	2003 Sales	2003 Market Share (%)
Nokia	207,231,300	30.7	180,672,400	34.8
Motorola	104,124,200	15.4	75,177,100	14.5
Samsung	85,238,400	12.6	54,475,100	10.5
Siemens	48,455,800	7.2	43,754,300	8.4
LG	42,276,800	6.3	26,213,700	5.0
Sony Ericsson	42,031,700	6.2	26,686,300	5.1
Others	144,643,700	21.6	113,009,600	21.7
Total	674,001,900	100.0	519,988,500	100.0

Note This table includes iDEN, but excludes ODM to OEM shipments.*

Source: Gartner Dataquest (March 2005)

Home Video Is Big Business

VHS and DVD prices may seem to be falling, but the studios are still raking in more in sales and rentals of VHS and DVD movies than they're making at the box office, according to the Video Software Dealers Association. Here are highlights of its 2004 annual report:



Source: Video Software Dealers Association

tidbits

The top five brands for DVD players, according to sales figures, are Cyberhome, Sony, Apex, Memorex, and Koss, in that order.
Source: The MPD Group/NPD Techworld

Apple announced on March 2, 2005, that customers had downloaded more than 300 million tracks from its iTunes digital music store.
Source: Apple

Samsung recently announced its 82-inch LCD HDTV—the largest so far.
Source: Samsung

XM Radio

On April 2, 2005, XM Radio raised its monthly subscription rate from $9.99 to $12.95.
Source: XM Radio

Microsoft has recalled more than 14 million potentially faulty Xbox power cords. Visit replacements.webprogram.com for more information.
Source: Microsoft

73.4% of PDA users have a Palm-brand device, followed by HP with 21.3% of the market share.
Source: The MPD Group/NPD Techworld

When given a choice between a normal music CD and a "copy-once" CD priced $5 less, 33% of those who do not rip CDs and 27% who rip CDs preferred the copy-once CDs.
Source: Parks Associates

Denon's philosophy is simple.

Either
you're
innovating
or
you're
imitating.

Introducing Denon's New AVR-5805

The World's First 10-channel A/V Receiver With Fully Configurable 4-zone Capabilities

A Breakthrough In Multi-source, Multi-zone Flexibility

For the home entertainment enthusiast and custom installer alike, Denon's new AVR-5805 delivers unprecedented four-zone home entertainment integration and control — all from a single component. With 10 configurable and discrete amplifiers, 16-channels of audio output, and the world's first-ever ability to drive two fully independent 5.1 systems, the AVR-5805 will also route audio and video signals from up to four independent sources and distribute them to up to four separate zones throughout the home. Its advanced capabilities even allow discrete power, source selection and volume control of each zone. And flexibility is just the beginning. Read on.

Masterful Technologies And A "Sweet Spot" For Every Listener

Behind the AVR-5805's newly designed, easy-to-read front panel display is a profusion of powerful technologies. An Equal Power amplifier section delivers a massive 170 watts of high-current power into each of its ten channels, processing for every popular 7.1-, 6.1- and 5.1-channel surround sound format — from Dolby (including Pro Logic IIx) and dts, to THX Ultra2 and THX Surround EX. The AVR-5805 also introduces the latest in Auto Setup Calibration and Equalization with the Audyssey MultEQ$_{XT}$ system, tailoring sound not only to the listening environment but also to the audience. This advanced technology analyzes and calibrates six critical settings including variable crossover point detection. It also determines the correct frequency response for up to six separate listener positions and then averages all six. The result? Literally a "sweet spot" for every listener in the room.

d-tools AMX CRESTRON

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This is innovation.

Advanced Video Conversion And Denon's Exclusive Circuitry

The AVR-5805 offers a full complement of advanced processing capabilities like HDMI/DVI digital video selection, video up-scaling (including Faroudja DCDi technology for analog sources) and the world's first dual, independent video conversion for unmatched simplicity and the highest picture quality from all your video gear. For even greater A/V performance, it employs the most advanced Texas Instruments' and Analog Devices' 32-bit DSP processors, Burr-Brown 24-bit/192kHz audio DACs, as well as Denon's newly improved DDSC-D (Dynamic Discrete Surround Decoder-Digital). And to top it off, exclusive Advanced AL24 Processing Plus circuitry maximizes all source signals so that the high-resolution DA converters work at peak capacity.

More Connection Options Than Any Receiver In The Industry

In addition to an extensive complement of digital and analog A/V connections, the AVR-5805 includes a full array of "custom installation" features: assignable high amperage DC trigger outputs, dual RS-232C ports to facilitate integrated system and PC connectivity, and a built-in Ethernet port that adds more system control as well as future updates and upgrades. In-demand connection options include 6 high-bandwidth (100 MHz,) HDTV-compatible component video inputs, HD switching for 2 zones and much more. Finally, the latest version of Denon Link 3 and dual IEEE-1394 inputs allow for reception of high-resolution, multi-channel digital audio data directly from compatibly equipped DVD players. It all adds up to total flexibility and the ultimate level of sonic performance. Denon does it again.

DENON

The First Name in Digital Audio

shelfwatch

As the weather warms up, our thoughts turn to favorite activities. And most of them involve moving around. Here are some hot new products that you'll be happy to take with you, helping you play or work on the go.

The Princeton Review Pocket Prep Handheld For The New SAT

$179.95

www.franklin.com

Franklin (the planner people) and Princeton Review have put together a handheld prep product specifically for the child in your life who's cramming for the SAT. The device features tutorials, practice exams, drill cards, and personal diagnostic reports. Tutorials and other verbal tools are specifically designed to help students prepare for the new essay, as well. Bring on the college recruiters.

Garmin C330 GPS Guide

$964.27

www.garmin.com

You don't need a built-in auto navigation system to get around. Garmin's ultra-portable and cute-as-a-button C330 will do nicely. Weighing just half a pound, the unit mounts easily in your car. It's preloaded with U.S. maps and attractions, so you can get from point A to point B with time to spare.

Sanyo CRSR-10 SIRIUS

$149.99

www.sanyo.com

Add satellite radio to your car or home—with just one device. Sanyo's diminutive receiver pulls in satellite radio and broadcasts with an FM transmitter (just tune in from any radio nearby). The package includes car and home docks, two antennas, and two power adapters. One feature we're particularly fond of is the Favorites tool; it notifies you when a particular artist or song is on any SIRIUS channel.

Philips (& Nike) MP3RUN

$299

www.philips.com

Designed for runners, the new 256MB MP3RUN combines music playback with audio feedback on distance, speed, and time. Wireless sensors track your performance while you listen to MP3s, WMA (Windows Media Audio) files, or FM radio.

Olympus C-5500 Sports Zoom Digital Camera

$349.99

www.olympusamerica.com

Don't miss another great soccer shot. Olympus' C-5500 has a 5X optical zoom for close-ups of your daughter's throw in, a less-than-one-second startup so you're not messing around when the game starts, and a 2.7fps (frames per second) burst mode to catch every part of every goal.

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Sharp 56DR650 56" DLP HDTV

$3,299.95

www.sharpusa.com

When it's time to slow down and kick back, you won't find an LCD or plasma TV this big with a price this small. And you won't find a regular TV this light and this thin. Sharp's DLP nicely splits the difference in price and size between tube and flat-screen technology with sharp, rich, high-definition video.

Sennheiser PXC300

$219.95

www.sennheiserusa.com

Drown out engine whine and screaming children with Sennheiser's new noise-canceling headphones. Special technology cancels ambient noise, while delivering crisp, clear audio from your source. The pair folds into a small carrying case for easy packing. Plug adapters fit jacks for portable devices, airplanes, and in-home stereo components.

BenQ P50 PDA Phone

$800

www.benq.com

BenQ's new P50 runs Pocket PC, compatible with Office applications, email, and Web browsing. It connects via GSM (Global System for Mobile Communications) mobile networks, Bluetooth, or Wi-Fi. It also has a 1.3MP (megapixel) camera, MP3 player, and full keyboard. How heavy does your notebook computer feel now?

outfit your life

Accessories With Style

April showers bring May accessories.
COMPILED BY SEAN DOOLITTLE

Anna Sui Mobile by Samsung
$299 (with T-Mobile Service Plan)
www.samsungwireless.com/shopannasui

You may be tired of showing up at meetings wearing the same cell phone as everyone else. If so, grab a little cellular couture with this limited-edition Samsung e315 clamshell phone designed by international fashion superstar Anna Sui. It features Sui's trademark purple color palate, a charm, and exclusive screensavers and comes with everything from a custom carrying case to Anna Sui signature "Rouge S" lip gloss.

Mobile Edge Red Full-Grain Leather Briefcase
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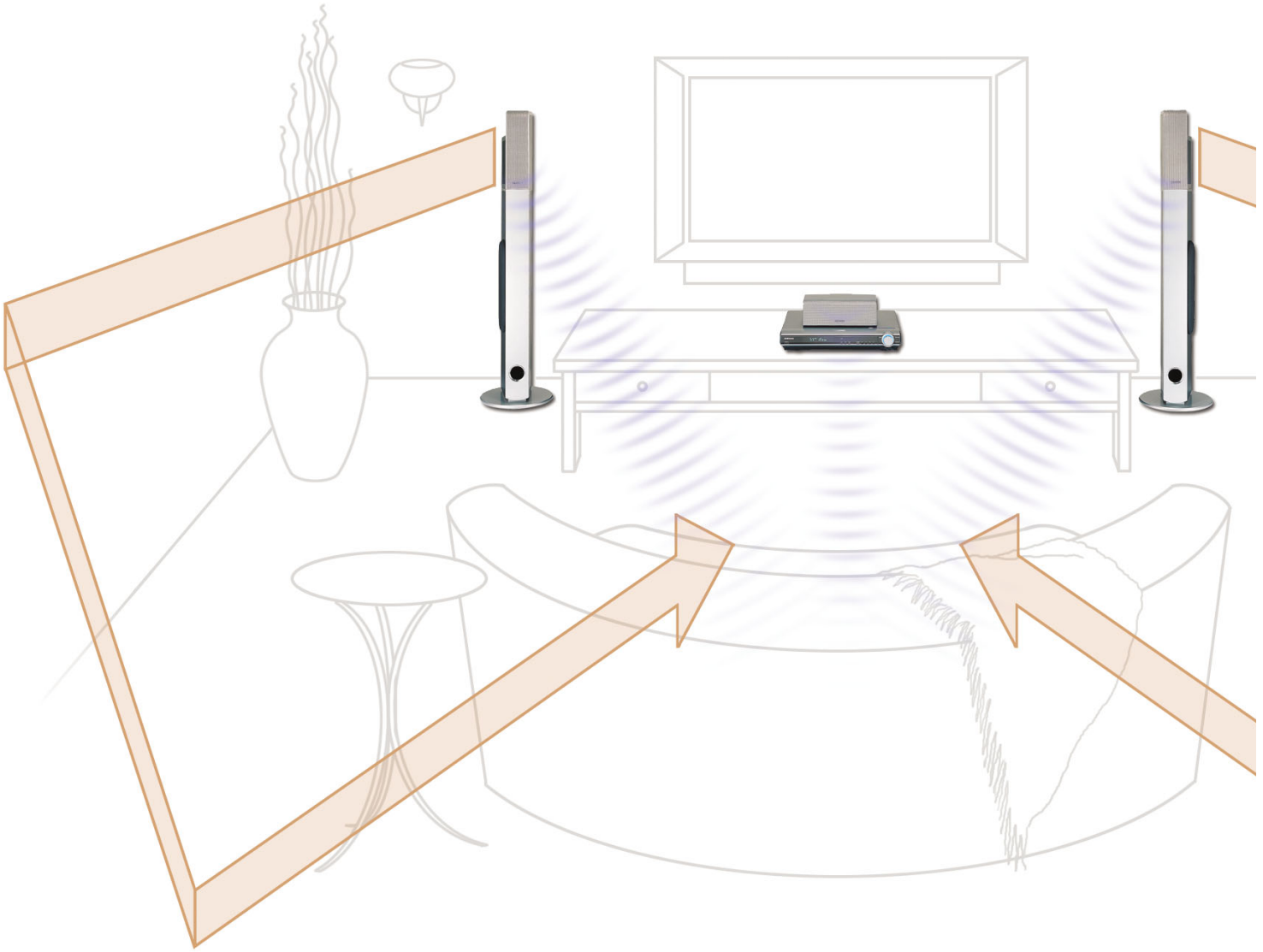
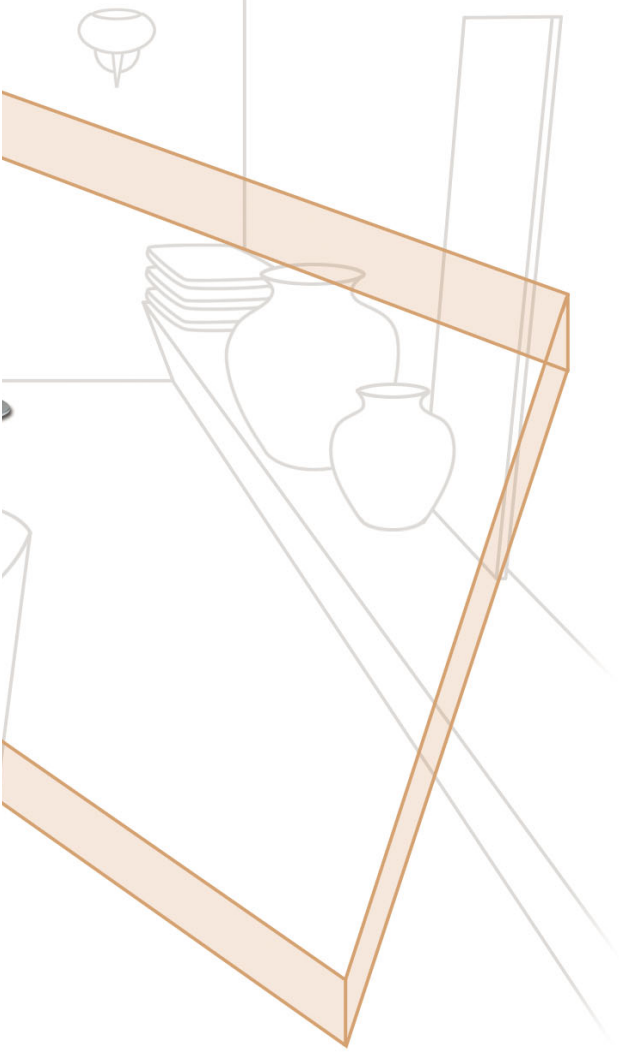


Aesthetics Of Audio

Virtual Surround Sound

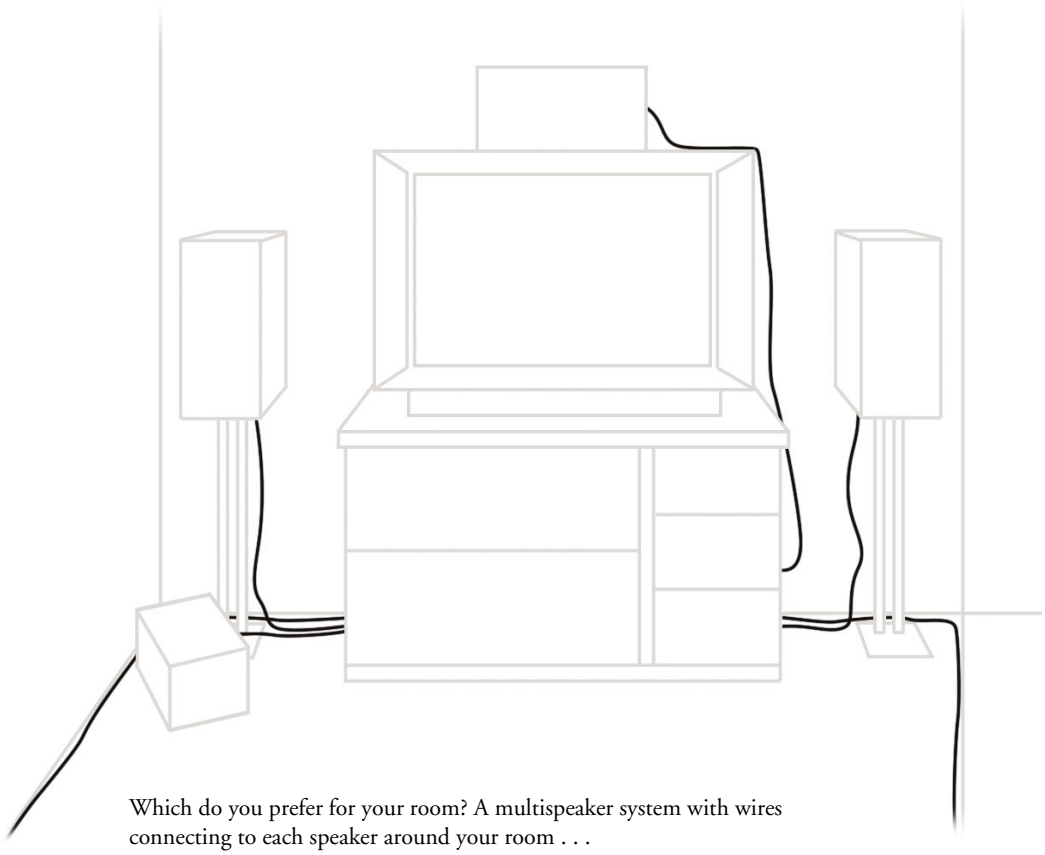


Unless you're a teenager, the days of regularly going to the movies are fading. People just don't seem to have the time or the energy to get out of the house as much as they used to. Most would rather sink into their favorite chair, line up their beverages and snacks of choice, and relax in privacy in front of their home entertainment centers. This shift has gone hand in hand with the advent of regular movie broadcasting on TV, special movies-only channels available through satellite or cable, and readily available selection of DVDs for rent.

If you have recently bought a new TV, chances are you upgraded to one with a bigger screen. Combine that with the relatively short viewing distance of the average living room, and you're getting close to the cinema experience—at least visually. But what about sound? Because vision is a primary sense for most of us, it may come as a bit of a surprise that the audible portion of the movie experience is as important, if not more important, than the size or quality of your TV's display. A small television with a great sound system can actually produce a more involving experience than a large display with so-so sound. If you find that your home viewing just doesn't have the same emotional "oomph" as the cinema experience, the difference in sound quality may be the reason.

Do Speakers Matter?

Everyone seems to have an opinion about which audio component matters the most. The reality is that in a sound system, everything matters. The various elements of a system are like links in a chain; one weak link will weaken the whole chain. Speakers are a very important link in the chain because each type and model can impose a distinct sonic signature. For effective sound from multichannel surround sound, it is particularly important that all the speakers have a similar sonic character. This usually means they must be either identical or designed as part of a surround ensemble. In most VSS systems, the speakers come with the system and are designed to work well together.



Which do you prefer for your room? A multispeaker system with wires connecting to each speaker around your room . . .

Fooling The Brain

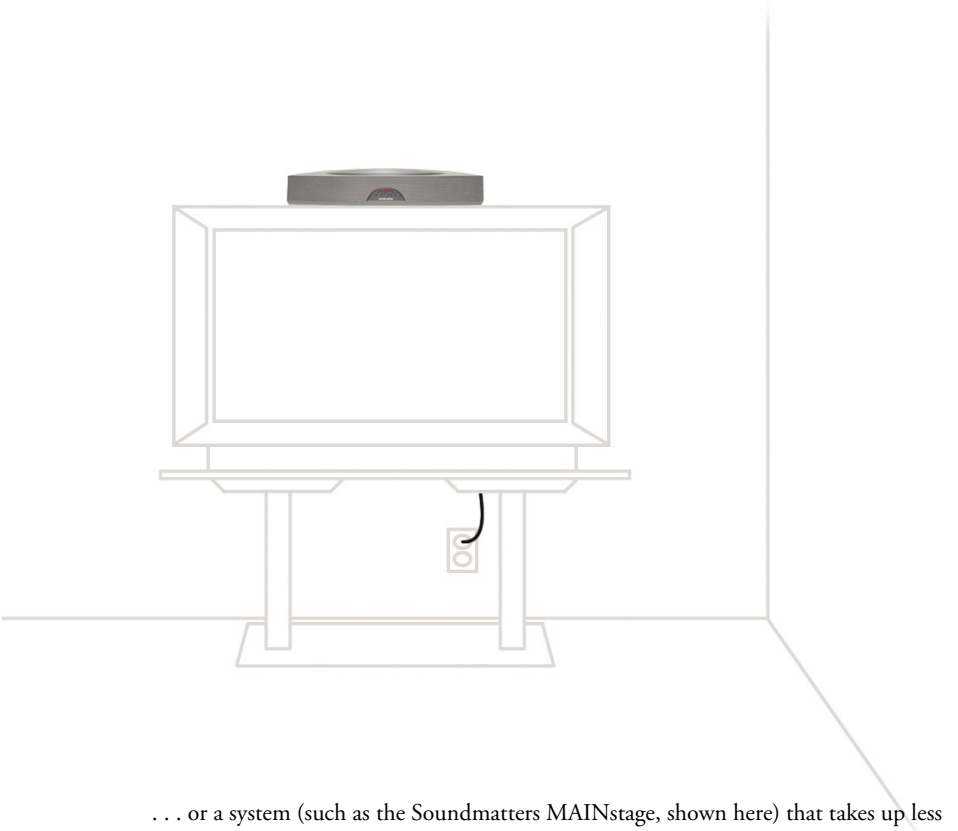
What if you could have the enveloping sonic effect of a sophisticated multispeaker system without all the wires and speakers? Some clever designers have found a way to do just that. As it turns out, the sounds we hear contain tiny echoes, timing delays, and frequency shifts caused by your head and body and the fold of your ear blocking sounds. The small difference in time between the arrival of a sound in one ear and its arrival at the other is also important. The brain uses these cues to determine where sounds are coming from in a process called **localization**.

The localization process, which occurs in the brain, is completely unconscious and so fast that your brain "knows" where a sound is coming from almost instantly. Through research, engineers have found a way to make sounds emanating from a speaker in front of you seem to come from beside or behind you. The result is VSS (virtual surround sound) technology, the illusion of surround sound without all the speakers.

Typical Surround Sound

Before we get into how VSS creates what seems like a surround-sound environment, we must understand the sound system on which it is based. Cinemas typically have powerful sound systems with dozens of high-quality speakers in front of, beside, and behind the audience to create a surround effect. Many home viewers have gone to great lengths to capture the emotional content of the movie experience by equipping their viewing rooms with similarly elaborate multichannel surround-sound systems. In most cases, the sound system not only costs more, but it is much more complicated to set up than the television alone. Today's standard for home multichannel sound is a 5.1-channel surround-sound system—that is, five speakers (one center, two mains, two rear) and one subwoofer, each playing a separate audio track encoded within the DVD format. These audio tracks are specially mixed to contain directional cues for sounds that move.

A plane flying from right to left on your screen, for example, is accompanied by a corresponding sound that moves in the same direction through your room. A properly set up surround system of sufficient quality can make sounds appear to float or move in any direction within the 3D space of your room. Imagine the



. . . or a system (such as the Soundmatters MAINstage, shown here) that takes up less space and still gives you a surround-sound effect when you watch your favorite movie?

excitement when a bullet is fired at your favorite action hero and you hear a whistling sound as if the projectile is whizzing past your ear.

The other, more subtle trademark of surround sound is a sense that you are in the scene. When the characters on-screen are sitting in a sidewalk café, you feel surrounded by the same street noises they are experiencing. These environmental sounds create a sonic ambience that provides a sense of personal involvement and suspends disbelief, both of which are critical to a satisfying cinema experience.

Explore Your Options

Unfortunately, a multichannel sound system at home means six wires running to five speakers and the subwoofer. If you have spent years on the finishing touches of a tastefully designed living room, the last thing you want is wires and speakers hanging around the room. If you want convincing movie sound and a sleek, organized look to your room, you have several options to make this dream a reality.

One-speaker systems. Some virtual surround systems produce credible surround sound from one speaker. The Niro 1.1 Pro II ($990; www.niro1.com) processes 5.1 channels using a built-in processor. The amplifier is about the same size as a smallish DVD player, and the single speaker sits unobtrusively above or below your TV. (Separate accessories include a stand for the speaker or brackets to attach the speaker to the wall.) You can tuck the subwoofer into a corner, and all the wires can run behind your television.

Listeners to the new Niro VSS systems say the effect is impressive, not to mention easy on the décor. The 1.1 Pro II is suitable for larger rooms (500 to 600 square feet), but Niro offers the Niro 600 ($749) for 300 to 400 square foot rooms and the Niro 400 ($539) for rooms up to 200 square feet. The Niro 400 works well with a PC or portable DVD player and fills a small room such as a typical office space.

One more speaker. Those who don't mind one extra speaker (and a little more wire) can opt for two speakers instead of one. This VSS is a bit more effective, but speakers are still not visually intrusive. Niro offers a two-speaker system that processes state-of-the-art 6.1 VSS by expanding the surround effect to include sounds that would come from directly behind the listener. The Niro Two6.1 ($1,999) comes with a subwoofer and

Making Multiple Speakers Look Good

With a bit of effort, multispeaker systems can be tastefully integrated into your living room. Audio equipment goes through fashion trends, which frequently make it possible to accurately date a piece of gear from a given decade. (The current fashion is black or silver with futuristic touches.) You can minimize the visual effect of multiple speakers by purchasing light-colored models or by painting them the same color as your walls (but don't get paint on the speaker cones). In-wall speakers with grilles you can paint are nearly ideal aesthetically, but they require more effort to install. You can run wires through the basement or attic or via special paintable wire guides that run along the baseboards.

two speakers, with one positioned above or below the TV display and one directly behind the listener. For smaller rooms, you can try the Niro Two6.1-C ($1,499).

Personal surround sound. Ever find yourself hankering for a late-night movie, but you don't want to wake the entire household? Niro has come up with the MovieMouse ($229), a miniature VSS speaker pod that connects to your Niro system and sits in front of you to deliver surround sound at a low volume. You can leave the MovieMouse conveniently plugged in and switch the sound to it via the remote control.

Sound reflection. Samsung has a version of VSS that confines itself to the area near your TV. The Samsung HT-DS660 ($599.99) uses a subwoofer, one center channel, and two front speakers and includes a DVD player. The rear speakers are virtual, produced by sound reflecting off the room's walls and ceiling to create 5.1-channel sound. The speakers sit at the front of the room, so you can discretely tuck the wires away. This system's effect is more dependent on the reflective properties of the room surfaces than are the Niro systems. For rear-reflection to work, you need a hard and smooth back wall that isn't too far from the seating position and is parallel to the front wall. A geometrically irregular room or room that has a large, open design won't work well with this technology.

Most DVDs come with 5.1-channel soundtracks that you can play through a VSS or multispeaker system.

Ultra-compact surround sound. If you are looking for a more compact and lower-budget product that still produces VSS, Soundmatters MAINstage ($329) offers amplifiers, speakers, and a built-in subwoofer in a single unit with 80 watts of power. The unit sits on top of your TV, producing a surround illusion without additional speakers.

Stereo connections. What if you already have a stereo with good-quality speakers arranged to either side of your TV? You may have found that you can run two channels of audio from your video source through your 2-channel stereo for better sound than the small speakers in your TV can provide. Unfortunately, this arrangement only gives you two of the 5.1 channels available on DVD.

SOUNDaround from Xitel ($99.95; www.xitel.com) lets you hear home theater sound through your two stereo speakers. You plug the multichannel digital output from your DVD player or other source into SOUNDaround's single processor box. The unit takes the 5.1-channel information encoded in the audio signal and adds direction cues for the sound. That output is fed into your stereo through the regular left and right input jacks. Presto! You get room-filling surround sound with no extra speakers.

Is Multichannel Surround Obsolete?

If virtual surround sound is so great, you may be asking if this means the end of

Do I Need Surround Sound If My TV Already Has It?

The short answer is yes. Most modern televisions have built-in stereo speakers, and a few models advertise built-in subwoofers or VSS capabilities. Though the sound production capabilities available on TVs have certainly improved over the years, the designers of these sets are still primarily concerned with the visual display and not the sound. As a result, the built-in sound on televisions usually falls short of what even a modest or medium-cost external sound system can achieve.

Home Cinema In A Box

The temptation to quickly and cheaply achieve great sound by purchasing a complete multichannel sound system in a box can be pretty strong. Keep in mind, however, that these systems vary considerably in quality. You can find plastic speakers with flimsy wires and poor fidelity amplification in some systems. Bad sound is still bad sound, no matter how many speakers it comes from. If you are considering a home cinema in a box, test the sound quality in the store, if possible, and research your options thoroughly before you buy.

multichannel sound systems. Not likely—or at least, not yet. While the surround effect of VSS can be impressive considering the small number of speakers, a high-quality multichannel system with six or more speakers arranged correctly is still hard to beat. The illusion that a sound is coming from behind you won't be as convincing to your ears as a sound that really is coming from behind you.

The main bottlenecks for VSS are the fidelity of the processing and the problem of getting the same volume and dynamic range out of one or two speakers as you might get from five or six. Also, if all your speakers are at the front of the room, then sounds that are supposed to come from the back of the room will be less convincing. Because of the processing involved, some VSS systems may also have short but noticeable delays. In addition, many consumers expect that a system with fewer speakers shouldn't cost much. The reality is that the cost to manufacture a good VSS system is as much or more than the cost to manufacture a multispeaker system, particularly when you consider the development costs.

This VSS speaker, as well as other Niro 400 components, comes in orange, silver, gray, or indigo blue to fit the style of your room.

The Last Word

The development of these VSS systems is a clear step forward for home theater. A surround purist, who enjoys running wires under baseboards and tweaking each channel for hours, may still prefer the real thing. However, those who rank form higher than function can use VSS to preserve their décor, save time and effort during setup, *and* get amazing results.

BY ROSS MANTLE

Surround Sound For Music

The sound effect that enhances the cinema experience can also enhance your favorite musical performances. But be warned: Enjoyable musical listening demands more from your sound system than the bangs and moving sound tricks that even inexpensive surround systems can muster. An obtrusive rumbling subwoofer that works fine in a movie, for example, can really wreck a nice jazz performance. If you plan on making your surround-sound system your main source for music as well as movies, then the most important criteria should be musical fidelity. This feature includes important elements that you should research as you shop, including refined high frequencies, tight bass, and good rendering of detail.

Multispeaker vs. Virtual Surround Sound

	Multispeaker	Virtual Surround Sound
Price	Available at all price points, including some systems that cost tens of thousands of dollars.	Confined to low and midprice levels when compared to the wide price range of multispeaker systems. Prices generally range from around $100 to around $2,000.
Surround Effect	Good to excellent, depending on system quality, room properties, and setup. 5.1 is standard; 7.1 is also available.	Effect can be impressive but diminishes at the point farthest from the speaker(s). Best systems render 5.1; lower-cost versions may only handle 3.1.
Aesthetics	Generally poor. Multiple speakers can be integrated into the décor, but effort is required.	Much easier to add to a room without compromising décor.
Setup & Calibration	Quite complicated and time-consuming. Enthusiasts are constantly fiddling with the settings.	Much simpler to set up physically with fewer calibration settings.
Multisource Compatibility	Typically have inputs for multiple sources: DVD, CD, cable, TV, radio, etc.	Also capable of multisourcing but may have fewer inputs.

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The Multimedia Car

Hit The Road In Style

Apple Computer's portable MP3 player, the iPod, is great because it lets you take thousands of songs with you wherever you go without lugging around a suitcase of CDs. However, we've found that it's often difficult to enjoy the iPod in one of the places we listen to music most—the car. Most car stereos don't offer a good way to connect an iPod or any other MP3 player for that matter. The result is, you're left with either the inferior sound quality and messy wires of cassette-tape style adapters or isolated from your library of digital music. However, a few companies have started providing equipment to help your vehicle interface with the iPod. We'll run through what devices we've seen and highlight some other multimedia features that can make travel more enjoyable.

Factory Installed Options

Car manufacturers are eager to associate themselves with the iPod brand, and a handful have rolled out iPod compatibility as an optional feature in some 2005 models. Mercedes-Benz provides the most integration, displaying song titles and artists names on the radio's console display. Volvo, Nissan, Alfa-Romeo, and Ferrari all provide an audio link and let you skip through songs, but you don't have complete control of all the player's functions. BMW sells an iPod upgrade kit for installation at dealerships on some models 2002 and newer. After plugging your iPod into the cable installed in the glove box, you'll be able to hear songs on the stereo, control the volume as you would a CD, and even select songs to play using BMW's on-steering-wheel controls.

Replace Your Stereo

If you don't have your eye on a new car, you can still make your current wheels MP3-compatible by adding a new stereo. A few of the newer stereos support other impressive features, such as DVD playback, surround sound, and touchscreens for GPS (global positioning system) satellite navigation mapping. Replacing a car stereo can be a complicated task, so unless you're adventurous, you should consider having a professional do the installation. Most electronics stores that sell car stereos will be able to direct you to a good installer or do the work themselves. Talking to an installer may also give you ideas about product features you'd like that you didn't even know existed.

The Clarion VRX755VD ($1,599.99; www.clarion.com) is a good example of an iPod-compatible car stereo with so many features you might forget about your iPod altogether. Although it looks like a car stereo and fits into the usual dashboard slot, at the touch of the button, a motorized panel extends from the front of the unit and pops up, revealing a 7-inch color LCD touchscreen.

Our Favorite Multimedia Cars

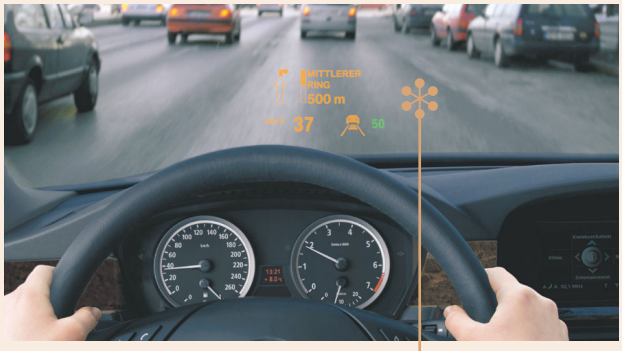
Most new cars today come with the option to upgrade the audio and video in the cabin. But there are a few dream machines that give new meaning to portable entertainment. Here are our favorites.

2005 Volvo S80 T6 Premiere (Starts at $49,150)

This model's RSE (Rear Seat Entertainment) system includes a CD/DVD player, viewing screens on the back of both headrests, and 68-channel color TV with game ports.

2005 Mercedes-Benz M-Class SUV (Starts at $38,670)

All 2005 M-Class SUVs (and many other 2005 models, as well) can be upgraded with the iPod Integration Kit, where you can use your steering-wheel controls to skip through your iPod playlist and view the tracks and artists in the in-dash display.



2005 BMW 545i Sedan (Starts at $55,800)

The coolest feature on this model is the Heads-Up Display, a virtual monitor that shows on your windshield and allows you to keep your eyes up and forward. Other features include Bluetooth connectivity and hands-free voice activation.

You can use the screen to control your iPod, which is attached to the connecting cable and stowed away in the glove compartment, or to view DVDs.

Clarion's unit can also send its video to a second screen, perhaps one mounted for backseat viewers, and can control optional CD and DVD changers, a Sirius satellite ratio receiver, and even a TV tuner via the proprietary CeNET bus system. Perhaps the unit's most ingenious feature is two-zone operation, which lets a parent listen to one song in the front seat while kids in the back listen to another. The remote control allows even rear seat passengers unprecedented mischief-making potential, so you may want to keep it in the front.

Upgrades Abound

Unless you're eager to watch DVDs in the car, spending hundreds of dollars for a touchscreen seems steep. If you're happy with your car stereo, it's possible to simply get an upgrade. Pioneer released its CD-IB100 iPod adaptor, which uses the company's proprietary IP-Bus system ($140; www.pioneerelectronics.com) to communicate with its stereos. If your stereo is one of the 3 million or so Pioneer units sold in the last few years, chances are it uses IP-Bus and will be compatible with the iPod adapter. If your Pioneer stereo isn't one of the newer models, you may not be able to use all the iPod's features. You'll still be able to charge the battery, hear high-quality audio, and skip through tracks, but only new 2005 models take advantage of the most sophisticated features, such as the ability to search through your music library.

Pioneer's AVH-P5700DVD ($1,200) is one of its new in-dash DVD players that's compatible with the iPod adapter. Like the Clarion unit, it has a motorized touch-sensitive screen and DVD movie playback, but by connecting optional components it can also serve as a GPS navigation device. The GPS component displays your current position on a street map and guides you to a destination with turn-by-turn directions, making getting lost virtually impossible.

If you're going for something that's useful, cost-efficient, and easy to install, check out the iTrip ($35; www.griffintechnology.com), which is an FM transmitter that you can plug right into your iPod's headphone jacks. You get your choice of frequencies, which is nice when you're on the road and between channels. Though it doesn't have any fancy interface like Pioneer's system, the iTrip is notably portable; you can take it inside and use it with a radio in your home, as well.

It's almost certain that the next few years will bring easier and better car stereo connectivity for the iPod and devices like it, and DVD players have their place, too. Because drivers can't enjoy movies while they're driving, the technology is most useful for passengers, especially kids, on long trips. We're keeping our eyes on the road ahead.

BY JOSEPH BELL

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tips Bass & Treble

1 Buff Up Those Buds

Portable music players often come with tiny ear buds that lack bass. To compensate, boost the bass control a little to get a fuller sound. At the same time, certain songs (especially newer rock, techno, and electronic music) have a full and powerful low-end mixed into the music. This means that the bass guitar, kick drum, or deep synthesizer sounds are already turned up in order to give the track a lot of bass. Playing this music over your personal stereo with the bass control boosted may make the sound harsh and distorted. If you increase the bass, adjust carefully so as not to overload the ear buds.

2 It All Hangs In The Balance

Sometimes, it makes more sense to adjust both the bass and the treble simultaneously. Let's say you're listening to a song, and it sounds a little muffled. Your first impulse might be to increase the treble. However, it's possible that the reason the system sounds muffled is because the bass is overly full. This can make it sound as though the treble needs a boost, when, in fact, a mild cut to the bass response can bring the rest of the sound into focus.

3 Less Is More

Any changes you do make should, in nearly all cases, be mild. The adjustments have a range in order to cover extreme situations (such as a badly recorded live concert, a band demo, or an overly screechy rock singer). Most of the time, though, the less you adjust, the better the sound. If you find that you have to boost the bass all the way up to get a pleasing result with all of your music, something else in the system might need adjustment. Are the speakers too far away from a wall? Move them closer, and you'll get increased bass response without overtaxing the amplifier. Is the sound too bright, and does it echo too much? Take a look at the room. If it's all hard surfaces and wood floors, see if you can introduce a throw rug or curtains somewhere, which will help dampen the sound and even out the treble.

4 Like Nails On A Chalkboard

Dealing with harsh treble is more difficult on just about any system. The problem is that the treble control adjusts a fairly wide range of sound, meaning that you're going to boost or cut too much music content at once. Drum kit cymbals, for example, inhabit higher frequencies than, say, the "sss" and "p" sounds on a vocal. If you cut the treble, you're affecting all of them at once. You might fix the nasty cymbals, but now Anthony Kiedis sounds like he's singing into a towel. Still, a mild cut or boost can help deal with muffled or overly tinny sounding music.

5 Easy On The Explosions, Tex

Home theater systems, on the other hand, often have the exact opposite problem. Many of these systems come with bass modules or powered subwoofers, along with five smaller satellite speakers. The subwoofer is often set way too loud from the factory in order to impress customers in the store. This might sound good for some movies, but it makes everything else sound boomy. Placing the subwoofer module near a wall or corner makes it worse, which is usually what most people do in order to blend the system with their décor. If your subwoofer has a separate level control independent of the bass and treble controls, try turning it down. In fact, don't be afraid to make it almost zero.

BY JAMIE LENDINO

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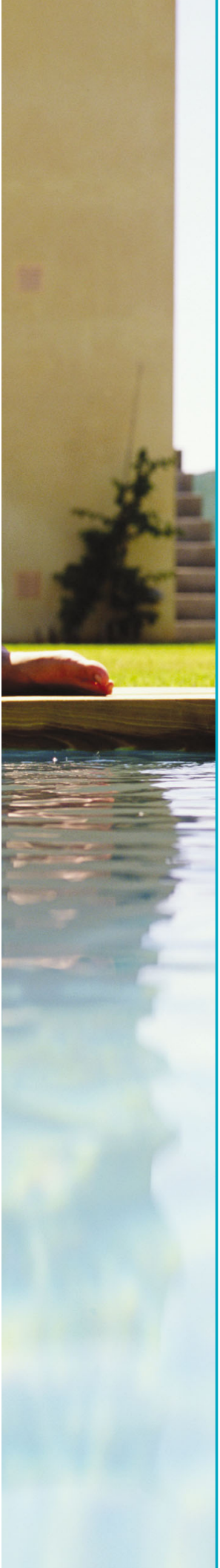


Take-Out Entertainment

Portable DVD Players

"Are we there yet?"

People would pay just about anything to never hear those words again, and thanks to the current crop of portable DVD players, getting that wish granted is cheaper than ever. These portable devices, which usually resemble notebook PCs but lack keyboards and are designed solely for playing DVDs, are available in a variety of shapes and sizes and at a variety of price points. Knowing what to look for and what advantages these devices can provide is essential if you want to catch some flicks during your next road trip.

Portable DVD Pros & Cons

Portable DVD players have two main advantages compared to other technologies—size and price. Most of these devices are small and thin enough to slip into a carry-on or briefcase, and they're light enough that you won't mind carrying them around. You may also play movies on DVD drives in notebook PCs, but notebooks weigh more that portable DVD players and require more battery power, and their screens are designed for computer work, not for movie viewing. Portable DVD players are also much cheaper than notebooks or hard drive-based players, although models with many advanced features and large screens cost nearly as much as a decent notebook PC. Samsung's DVD-L1200 ($999.99; www.samsung.com), for example, has a relatively enormous 12-inch screen and measures only about 1 inch thick when closed, but it'll set you back nearly $1,000.

Portable DVD players have two main advantages compared to other technologies—size and price.

Unfortunately, portable DVD players have several limitations. Perhaps the biggest potential drawback inherent to a portable DVD player is the LCD technology used to make the screens. The quality of these displays has improved dramatically over the years, but it still varies wildly from player to player.

Get Creative

Portable DVD players are good for far more than road trips. Here are five unusual ways you can get the most from your player.

- **Cheer up a sick friend.** Watching TV at the hospital stinks. If you have a friend or loved one who's in for an extended stay, let her borrow your player and bring her new rental movies each time you visit.
- **Bring Hollywood to the B&B.** Going to a bed & breakfast is a great way to get away from it all because most don't have phones or TVs in the room, but nothing sets the mood like a romantic movie.
- **Add a helper to the kitchen.** If your portable DVD player can handle recordable DVDs, dump your favorite cooking shows to a disc and let them guide you as you cook.
- **Learn a foreign language.** There are plenty of good foreign language instructional videos out there, but watching them at home is a chore. Pop them in the portable and turn a dull commute into a learning experience.
- **Home movies away from home.** Recording home movies to DVD is great, but many people have DVD players that can't read the discs. If your portable player can play recorded DVDs, hook it up to other people's TVs when you visit them and share your memories.

If you see a huge price difference between two units that have seemingly identical specifications, most of the time the cheaper one has a vastly inferior screen. Cheap LCDs render fewer colors than more expensive models and also have poor contrast, meaning whites look bright gray and blacks look dark gray instead of being pure white or pure black.

While the color and contrast problems are bad enough, cheap LCDs generally have poor response rates, as well. The **response rate** tells you how quickly the screen reacts when video images shift and is measured in milliseconds with lower numbers corresponding to faster reaction times and better video quality. Screens with slow response rates (20 milliseconds or higher, depending on other factors) leave ghost images on the screen whenever there's a lot of on-screen action, making video look streaky. Manufacturers rarely list response-rate times for their products, so take a few action movies to the store and play them on DVD players you are considering to see if they can handle all of the on-screen movement.

Portability vs. usability poses tremendous issues for designers of these devices. On the one hand, customers want a portable DVD player to be as small as possible for easy transport, but they also want large screens so they can see more detailed video. The need to play relatively large DVDs and hold inside all of the equipment that spins them also means that portable DVD players will never be as small as some of the devices discussed in the "Mobile Video Alternatives" sidebar. DVD drives also rely on a lot of delicate moving parts, making them fragile, which is something you definitely don't want with a product that you'll be toting around and letting your kids use.

Small form factors leave little room for speakers, and the internal sound we've

Portability vs. usability poses tremendous issues for designers of these devices.

heard from portable DVD players we've auditioned is universally tinny, shrill at high volume levels, and lacking in bass response. The cure is a good set of headphones, so factor that into the price because the headphones that come with most portable DVD players are of marginal quality.

Battery life, or lack thereof, is another major issue with these devices. LCDs use backlights and transistors that require a lot of power, and because the DVD spins constantly when a movie's playing, the DVD drive sucks up a lot of juice. Good players can operate for three to four hours before requiring a recharge, and some models, such as Panasonic's DVD-LS55 ($499.95; www.panasonic.com), claim a battery life of 10 hours. Real-world performance varies so never expect to watch more than one or two two-hour movies unless you've connected the player to an external power source. Turning down the volume can help conserve battery life, especially if you use the player's integrated speakers, but the best way to squeeze a few more minutes from your player is to turn down the brightness of the screen.

What To Watch For

If you decide the benefits of a portable DVD player outweigh its disadvantages, there are several features to consider when comparing competing models.

Form factors and design elements. Most portable DVD players use a clamshell design where the LCD forms a lid that folds down on the base; it's similar to a notebook PC. Clamshell models are easy to carry and are relatively rugged because the screen is protected when the unit is closed. When open, their relatively large bases make it easy to balance the device on your lap or set on an airplane's seat tray. Because the screen is on a hinge, positioning it so you view it at the best angle is a snap.

Some models, such as Panasonic's DVD-LX8 ($699.99; www.panasonic.com) take this a step further by letting the screen pivot, as well as tilt, which is great for watching movies on a plane because you don't have to worry about the base of the player hanging off of the edge of the seat tray.

Many portable DVD players protect the DVD drive with a plastic lid that pops up so you can insert or remove discs. That means you must open the DVD player to swap discs, which is sometimes awkward when you're listening to CDs instead of watching videos and want to

Shopping Tips

- ☐ Player small enough to fit in car or sling
- ☐ Salespeople let you demo your own DVDs
- ☐ Plenty of accessories available
- ☐ Note necessary A/V inputs and outputs
- ☐ Good battery life

Accessory Alert

Your backseat passengers may want to watch a movie without bothering you, the driver, but most portable players have only one headphone jack. Solve this problem by buying an inexpensive Y-splitter that turns one headphone jack into two jacks.

Accessory Alert

The popularity of portable DVD players has spawned an industry of related accessories, and most are actually useful. Some players have integrated batteries that you can't swap out for fully-charged spares, but for long car trips, for example, you'll likely prefer players that support swappable batteries. (Just be aware that extra batteries are expensive.) Look for players that come with their own car power plug adapters so you don't have to buy a separate adapter kit. Players with international AC power plug adapters are nice if you travel frequently, although you can find separate kits.

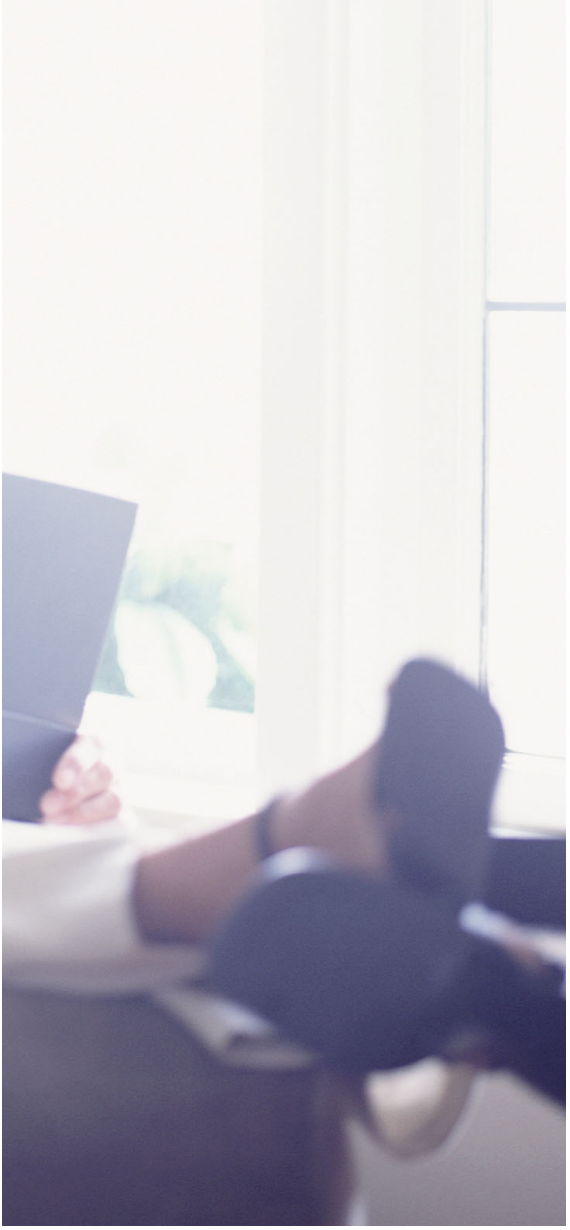
If you want to connect your portable DVD player to a TV, pay attention to its video output ports.

put in a new disc. The alternative is a slot-loading drive, which pulls discs into a slot in the front or side of the unit. Slot-loading players are less popular because they're fragile; the insertion and eject mechanism in these types of drives often fails if you drop the player because there are a lot of extra moving parts.

Inputs & Outputs

Most portable DVD players have a variety of input and output ports that let you use them in various ways. For example, portable DVD players with video outputs let you connect the player to a TV and use it as a standard DVD player, while units with optical digital outputs let you connect them to surround-sound stereo systems for vastly improved sound. An increasing number of portable DVD players have integrated FM transmitters that let them send audio to your car's FM radio so you can listen to movies over your car's speakers wirelessly by tuning to a specific FM channel. Some portable DVD players also have video input ports so you can connect them to other devices, such as camcorders or video game consoles, and use the LCD to display incoming video.

If you want to connect your portable DVD player to a TV, pay attention to its video output ports. Cheaper units have only composite and S-Video outputs, which have relatively poor video quality but work well with older TVs that don't support newer connections. If your newer TV supports component video (or better yet progressive scan via component video), look for a portable DVD



player that supports component video output. Not all portable DVD players support progressive-scan video, which reduces flickering on the screen and provides brighter and more detailed video output, but if your TV supports progressive-scan, buying a player that can output that signal will vastly improve the look of DVD movies.

Most commercial DVDs have Dolby Digital or DTS surround-sound soundtracks embedded in them that sound great when piped to a surround-sound speaker setup. Make sure you have the right hardware with your portable DVD player to take advantage of this improved audio. Extracting the surround-sound information requires a Dolby Digital or DTS decoder, and some portable DVD players have this extra hardware built in. Most, however, are designed to send the raw signal to a surround-sound receiver that has its own decoder. You'll need at least one decoder in the chain, and you'll hear surround sound (assuming you enable the surround-sound track using the DVD's setup menu).

Disc Compatibility

The most basic portable DVD players handle only the commercial DVD movies you buy or rent, along with commercial audio CDs. An increasing number of players can also read other disc formats. Recordable CD and DVD formats are the most common, including CD-R (CD-recordable), CD-RW (CD-rewriteable), DVD-R (DVD-recordable), DVD-RW (DVD-rewriteable), DVD+R (another recordable DVD format), and DVD+RW (another rewriteable DVD format). If you have a camcorder, computer, or stand-alone recorder that records any of these discs, try to find a portable DVD player that'll play them.

DVD Audio is a high-quality sound format that some portable DVD players support, but you won't be able to get the most out of these discs without connecting the player to a surround-sound system, particularly if you use your portable DVD player as your primary DVD player. Many portable players can handle recorded CDs or DVDs that contain compressed digital music files, such as MP3 or MPA tracks, and many also display JPEG (Joint Photographic Experts Group) images recorded to a CD or DVD (such as those on Kodak Picture Discs). If you are one of the unfortunate souls who bought VCDs (Video CDs) when that failed format appeared, there are a few portable DVD players that can play VCD movies. CE

BY TRACY BAKER

Accessory Alert

If your portable DVD player doesn't have an FM transmitter and you want to listen to audio through your car's speakers, look for a cassette-tape adapter that connects to the portable player's headphone or audio out jack and pipes sound to your car's cassette tape player. External FM transmitters also are available, but the sound generally isn't as good as that of a cassette-tape adapter.

Accessory Alert

To make your portable pull double-duty as a home DVD player, as well, look for a model that includes a remote control or supports one. Also consider units with docking cradles that remain permanently connected to the TV, while the portable DVD player easily disconnects from the cradle for travel. Panasonic's DVD-LX9, for example, has a docking cradle that helps justify the unit's $899.95 retail price.

Accessory Alert

When you want to use the portable player in a car, look for a unit that's compatible with a sling. A sling holds the player (and movies and accessories) and straps to the back of a car seat so viewers don't have to balance the unit on their laps. It's a must-have accessory for people with kids. Portable DVD players are already convenient, but with the right mix of accessories, you can tailor your player to meet your everyentertainment need.

Family-Friendly DVD Players

Find The Right Fit For Your Household

Portable DVD players are quickly gaining momentum to join the ranks of "necessary" personal equipment along with cell phones, notebook computers, iPods, and gaming consoles. CD players are out, and portable DVD players are in. Why? These amazing little machines can do it all: play movies, games, and music; tune into local radio and television stations; and even double as external storage devices when connected to a PC through a USB port. Most models feature CD-R/RW and DVD-R/RW capabilities, which means they are complete, all-in-one entertainment centers that families and professionals can take on the road or transport with ease from home to school to the office.

So, while traveling cross-country to the Grand Canyon this summer, gather 'round the campfire with family and friends and plug your portable DVD player into your vehicle's cigarette lighter (or just use the rechargeable, long-life battery). Listen to your favorite CD while roasting weenies over the fire or squeeze in close, turn the swivel screen so everyone can see, and watch "The Incredibles." Tomorrow morning, mount the player on the back of the front seat's headrest and let the kids watch "Peter Pan" in the back. This entertainment tool can be a lifesaver on long trips and makes the miles go by much faster. It also minimizes the number of times you have to hear the age-old, frequently asked question, "Are we there yet?"

Compare Features

Not only do kids want to watch movies in the car or in their bedrooms if their siblings are watching their favorite shows on TV in the living room, they also want to see a clear picture through the glaring sun and hear clear sounds over the hum of the highway. And they want to be comfortable if they have to share the screen or sound with a sister or friend. Manufacturers have dozens of features to make your experience with your portable DVD player as satisfying to you—and your kids—as it can be.

Visuals. DVD player choices seem endless, with myriad features for every situation and each individual's specific needs. For example, the Adaptive Image Control in Samsung's DVD-L300 ($699.99; www.samsung.com) lets you choose the most effective view for various lighting conditions. Some LCDs, such as the Panasonic DVD-LS50 ($399.99; www.panasonic.com), reduce glare—another useful feature for kids traveling with the setting sun glaring through the car's backseat windows.

Other models offer adjustable screen brightness, a high-resolution display, widescreen and conventional or letterbox formats, and screens that swivel up to 180 degrees for multiple viewing angles (such as Toshiba's SD-P2700 [$499.99; www.toshiba.com]).

Sound. Your player's internal sound system may offer weak audio, virtual

These amazing little machines can do it all: play movies, games, and music; tune into local radio and television stations; and even double as external storage devices.

surround sound, or Dolby Digital. Audiovox's 8-inch D1810 ($529; www.audiovox.com) has Dolby Digital DTS, Q-Surround Sound with built-in stereo speakers; players with these features can double for stereo systems at parties, poolside, or at the beach. The sound quality is *that* good.

Some portable DVD carrying cases let you hang your player from the back of the front seat's headrest so those in the backseat can view the screen easily without having to hold the player.

Manufacturers are adding features to their systems to remain competitive in the market.

Extras. Manufacturers are adding features to their systems to remain competitive in the market. For example, if the adults want to listen to the in-car stereo, portable DVD players let you attach headphones, including those with a Y connector for shared listening. But, you have four children and you are afraid all those headphone cords are going to get tangled across two rows of seats and four little squirming bodies in the minivan? No problem. Many portable players have two headphone jacks, and many headphones today are wireless.

Clarion recently released model VRX755VD ($1,599.99; www.clarion.com), an in-car DVD player that offers an integrated iPod interface. Using a touchscreen control pad, you can see your iPod's playlist, song, and artist information and play songs right from your iPod. Another unique feature of this player is the 2 Zone Entertainment system, which lets you view and/or listen to two sources simultaneously. This means that Mom can dial up Sirius Satellite Radio or listen to her favorite CD while the kids watch a movie in the backseat. (See "The Multimedia Car" on page 31 to learn more about the Clarion VRX755VD.)

Some portable DVD players also have progressive scan video outputs for a high-quality picture, an integrated or optional TV tuner, A/V inputs and outputs including S-Video, built-in or rechargeable batteries, a wireless remote control, IR (infrared) wireless headphones, an FM transmitter, game ports, a joystick, built-in games, stereo speakers, or a cable-ready TV module.

If you're worried about protecting your player and these valuable features, a multitude of heavy-duty cases are available with tough sleeves; thick, protective padding; weatherproof sealers to shield players from inclement conditions; adjustable cushioned dividers; and

sturdy Koskin, nylon, leather, neoprene, and/or simulated leather exteriors. Check out the "Standalone Accessories" sidebar for some examples.

Price. The list of portable players, features, and accessories goes on forever, and the costs reflect each system's quality and enhancements. Prices range from as low as around $80 to around $1,500. These are the extremes; most players fall into a price range somewhere between $125 and $500. Adding numerous accessories can, of course, inflate these initial costs, but don't worry, prices always come down—until the next new technology dawns on the horizon, and then the cycle starts all over.

A Player For Active Lifestyles

Most portable DVD players are durable, lightweight, and thin. GoVideo (www.govideo.com) has a sporty and super kid-friendly line of portable DVD players.

GoVideo's Off-Road players, models DP6240, 7240, and 8240 (see the "GoVideo's Kid-Friendly Portable DVD Player Line" chart for pricing information), offer Anti-Shock Protection and Impact Shield Rubber Edges. The company designed these Off-Road players for the "rigors of an active lifestyle." The other four models, the DP5040, 6040,

Standalone Accessories

Accessories for portable DVD players are available in abundance, and the list continues to expand. Some portable DVD players include standard accessories such as rechargeable batteries, adapters, remote controls, and headphones, but other manufacturers (in order to offer their products at a lower price) charge extra for these items.

Standalone accessories include credit card-sized remote controls, folding headphones with Y connectors for dual or multiple listening, retractable earphones, and extended-life batteries. Many manufacturers also include a number of cables and adapters for multiple inputs or outputs, such as DC adapters for standard electricity, cigarette lighter adapters for the car, cables to transfer the picture on your portable DVD player to a larger screen, USB cables for computer connections, and connectors that plug into existing in-car DVD systems.

Other favorite accessories include a TV tuner for catching local broadcasts (especially the weather while traveling), an FM transmitter for playing audio files through your car stereo, external speakers for entertaining bigger crowds at birthday parties or other social gatherings, and an assortment of durable DVD player travel cases.

CyberHome's ACB-01 Deluxe Carrying Case ($49.99; www.cyberhome.com) hangs conveniently on the back of the front seat headrest for children's viewing. This carrying case has a rigid frame but a padded interior to keep your player (with up to a 7-inch display) safe while you travel.

Targus Group International has seven portable DVD cases to fit your active lifestyle and equipment. Favorites include the Targus Mini Sport ($19.99; www.targus.com), a sporty, lightweight case made of neoprene for players with up to 8.9-inch screens and the Targus Vehicle Travel Case ($39.99), which is for players with up to 10-inch screens and is made of heavy-duty nylon with mesh pockets. Targus' versatile Travel Backpack ($29.99) is made of durable nylon that transforms from car theater to carrying case to backpack in a matter of seconds. Kids can take this model to summer camp, after-school daycare, sleepovers with cousins and friends, or up the ladder to the tree house. It has padded shoulder straps for backpacking comfort, a side-strap, briefcase handle for hand carrying, safety bumpers to protect your player and DVDs, front storage pockets to hold accessories, and a headphone loop.

If you shop around, you are sure to find a case that will be comfortable for you to carry and keep your player safe throughout your travels.

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7040, and 8440, are Entertainment On The Go systems and share some of the same components and features as the Off-Road players. They all have rechargeable batteries, various adapters including the cigarette lighter adapter, and headphone jacks, but no headphones. And the DP7040 and 8440 have an optional 181-channel TV tuner that converts portable players into portable televisions. Very few of the other available players boast, or even mention, their systems' strength and durability.

Just For Kids

One of the newest portable DVD innovations was designed just for kids—specifically, kids younger than 15. In January Samsung unveiled the new Hand Held Mini DVD Player, affectionately nicknamed DVD Jr. It has a 2.5-inch LCD and supports popular formats such as JPEG (Joint Photographic Experts Group), MP3, and 3-inch camcorder and home recorded DVDs.

Warner Home Video partnered with Samsung (and several other electronic manufacturers with similar devices) to offer a vast archive of Mini DVD movies and entertainment programs. These 3-inch discs also work on standard DVD players that play 5-inch DVDs. So, in case parents want to watch some of their children's favorites, they can purchase the smaller media without fear that it will only run on their son's 3.5-inch screen. Initial releases include "Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban," the X-Men series, popular cartoons and animated films, and television specials.

Samsung has an aggressive merchandising plan for their new baby, but many in the industry say aggressive or not, DVD Jr. will sweep the planet, just like video games did when they first came out.

Accessories include a 2.5-hour NiMH (nickel-metal hydride) rechargeable battery, a DC power jack, a headphone port (no headphones), and one free Warner Brothers title (with a mail-in offer for two more). The DVD Jr. is scheduled for release in April 2005 for $149.99.

Similar to the DVD Jr., the Microtek FunView S350 ($199.99; www.microtekusa.com) has a 3.5-inch TFT LCD, a compact, lightweight design, and a fun circular shape with no sharp corners or

One of the newest portable DVD innovations was designed just for kids—specifically, kids younger than 15. In January Samsung unveiled the new Hand Held Mini DVD Player, affectionately nicknamed DVD Jr.

Keep The Car Ride Quiet

The JAVOeBuds retractable earphones ($18.95; www.javoedge.com) are the first earphones designed with a retractable mechanism, a small but lovely innovation for keeping cords organized. These lightweight, comfortable, but durable earphones are travel-friendly for adults but not recommended for kids. They are available in two sizes, 2.5mm and 3.5mm, and they are compatible with all audio devices including notebook computers and the iPod.

Shure's E Series earphones ($99 to $499; www.shure.com) use flex or foam sleeves to block background noise and produce studio-quality sound. And because ears come in different shapes and sizes, Shure offers three pairs (small, medium, and large) of disposable foam and disposable flex sleeves for a comfortable, custom fit. Each pair weighs about an ounce, and each set includes a zippered carrying case with a spool to keep your earphones from getting tangled.

Family-Friendly Features At A Glance

Here are some features you may want to look for when you shop for your ideal portable DVD player.

- [ ] Sturdy, rugged body construction
- [ ] Easily portable for entertainment on the go
- [ ] Dual, retractable earphones for shared listening
- [ ] Cigarette lighter adapter for continuous recharging
- [ ] Extended-life batteries
- [ ] TV tuner
- [ ] 5- to 12-inch swivel screens
- [ ] iPod-compatible
- [ ] User-friendly
- [ ] Durable
- [ ] Affordable

GoVideo's Kid-Friendly Portable DVD Player Line

Model	Size & Format	Price
DP5040	5-inch standard LCD	$149.99
DP6040	6.2-inch widescreen LCD	$179.99
DP6240	6.2-inch widescreen LCD	$179.99
DP7040	7-inch widescreen LCD	$199.99
DP7240	7-inch widescreen LCD	$199.99
DP8240	8.4-inch widescreen LCD	$279.99
DP8440	8.4-inch widescreen LCD	$279.99

edges. And to make the player ideal for kids to use, Microtek included a port for headphones and a built-in stand for hands-free viewing.

The only downfall with these systems is the lack of physical durability that a kid's player needs. Although cute and certainly a comfortable size, the Microtek FunView S350 and even Samsung's DVD Jr. should have hard shells, tough skin, and a simple GUI (graphical user interface). These two products' designs cannot compare to GoVideo's rugged, kid-friendly, active-lifestyle product line.

A Focus On Family

Times change, and in the electronics world, they are changing faster than ever. Most kids learn to type and play video games much earlier in life than they did even 10 years ago. And as you can see, some devices (including portable DVD players) aren't just for adults anymore. As the consumer electronics industry continues to evolve, manufacturers will undoubtedly continue to focus on developing electronics that work well for your growing family. ce

BY JULIE SARTAIN

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For Portable DVD Players . . .

Size Does Matter

Portable DVD players are growing in popularity as many realize the benefits of taking these devices on airplanes, in the car, or simply to another room of the house while a family member watches the main TV. But if you take your DVD player with you often, inches and ounces can add up, especially when you consider you'll also be packing a rechargeable battery and other accessories. And if you're carrying luggage, a laptop, briefcase, shoulder bag, or other items, a couple of extra, unnecessary pounds could be the last straw.

When shopping for a portable DVD player, you can easily focus only on features such as image and sound quality and overlook features such as size and weight. With screen sizes ranging from 3.5 to 12 inches and weights from 1.5 to 4 pounds, size and weight should be just as important a consideration.

But now that many players have evolved so that some units are smaller than a paperback book, you may find yours as indispensable as a cell phone. Who says you have to be glued to the entertainment center to watch a movie? Enjoy "Message in a Bottle" as you soak in a luxurious bath or take a break, crawl into bed, and relax while watching "Lost in Translation." Or, you can work out with your Pilates DVD indoors or out. Use your DVD player to listen to CDs or MP3 music or take your portable DVD player to Grandma's cabin, hook it up to the TV, and show her your digital photos or video of your daughter's dance recital.

Know Where You'll Watch

With so many sizes available and so many ways to use a portable DVD player, you must consider where you'll be watching this device so you can find one that looks great *and* fits your lifestyle. Size and weight can affect how clear your picture is and if your DVD player will be easy to carry with you where you want to take it.

If you need a small unit you can fit into your purse or small bag, you likely won't get the same image quality found in a larger unit. On a smaller unit, image distortion can be a problem unless you're looking straight at the screen. A player with a 5-inch screen, such as the Audiovox D1500B ($169; www.audiovox.com), might seem suitable to have on while you put on makeup in the morning, but you probably won't want it to occupy three kids spread across the backseat on a long road trip.

Also consider whether the player is widescreen (16:9 aspect ratio) or conventional (4:3 aspect ratio). A widescreen unit offers more viewing area than a conventional screen and is easier to view from an angle.

For two people sitting on an airplane, the DVD player will probably sit on one person's tray table. The person who's viewing from an angle will possibly see a distorted image on a smaller screen. For this purpose, aim to buy no smaller than a 7-inch widescreen. Two options for a 7-inch player are the GoVideo DP7040 ($199.99; www.govideo.com) and the IDM-1731 ($199; www.initialdvd.com), which measures 1.5 inches high x 7.5 inches wide x 5.6 inches deep (closed on a flat surface) and weighs about 1.75 pounds.

You might consider a bigger unit such as the 8.4-inch GoVideo DP8440 ($297.99; www.govideo.com). In many ways it's a fairly typical portable DVD player. It supports MP3s and JPEG (Joint Photographic Experts Group) digital image files, plays CDs as well as DVDs, and has outputs for connecting to digital surround sound. This model weighs 2.09 pounds and has an optional DPT100 TV tuner accessory ($49.99), so you can use the player as a little television.

Another option is a portable DVD player with two screens. These are especially suitable for long drives with kids. However, adding a screen increases the weight you have to carry. With a feature like this, you have to decide if the screens are more important to you than the added hassle of the extra part. All Durabrand portable DVD players, sold at Wal-Mart, feature two screens—one that's in the player and a separate screen that connects to it. With the model PVS1960 (Funai; $278; www.walmart.com), which has two 6.2-inch screens, one child can even watch a movie while the other plays video games.

Tote A Tiny Portable

Sometimes you want to do your own thing, but you get talked into going somewhere you'd rather not be. If you're sitting in a testosterone-filled

Target Weight

Weight is not really an issue if your portable DVD unit merely travels from the kitchen to the craft table to the bedroom or if it just hangs on the back of the front seat's headrest in the car for the kids. But it becomes a huge issue if one, you're carrying it from Concourse A to Concourse D and two, you're schlepping a laptop, briefcase, mega-purse, and shopping bags along with it. After five minutes, the load you thought was manageable seems to gain weight with every step you take.

So, when you're shopping for a portable DVD player, don't only be dazzled by the sleek-looking unit with a brushed aluminum finish. Do a reality check before you take it home. What does it weigh? Will it fit in your purse or wherever you plan to take it? If you travel a lot or plan to carry the player in your backpack or purse often, aim for a lighter player that weighs around 2.5 pounds or less. If you will likely only move your DVD player from room to room at home, you can buy a player that weighs up to 4 pounds and probably not be bothered by the extra weight. Make an appropriate choice, and you won't ever have to decide to leave the player at home because it's too bulky or heavy.

Get A Larger Unit If . . .

- Your kids will insist on watching the entire first season of "SpongeBob SquarePants" on a road trip to Grandma's cabin.
- On a flight, you and your husband will watch a movie at the same time so someone may be viewing the screen at an angle.
- Some relatives at your upcoming family reunion have failing eyesight, and you want to show the photos you took at the last reunion.
- You can't imagine having to squint to see Johnny Depp.
- You'll need to follow directions from a scrapbooking or other craft DVD.
- You'll view it at a distance from your treadmill.

Samsung 12-inch DVD-L1200
$999.99 • www.samsung.com

Audiovox 5-inch D1500B
$169 • www.audiovox.com

theater getting dizzy from watching car chases, take out your little DVD player, put on your headphones, and discreetly watch "Thelma and Louise" or another favorite that your husband would never watch with you at home.

These little portables, along with most portable DVD players, can connect to a TV with the right cables. One model is the 3.5-inch Coby TF-DVD500 (around $175; www.coby.com). Its composite video output may not give you the best TV picture, but when you're packing without an inch of space to spare, it's hard to beat this player's compact size. (For the best quality image on a TV, your portable DVD player should have a component video or S-Video output.)

The latest gizmo for kids, launched this year at CES (Consumer Electronics Show) in Las Vegas, is Samsung's DVD Jr. ($149.99; www.samsung.com), a handheld unit that plays 3-inch Mini DVDs on a 2.5-inch screen. Samsung has partnered with Warner Home Video to provide Mini DVD titles, and while now there is a limited number of cartoons and movies on 60-minute discs, more titles will soon become available from Warner, as well as other studios. A typical movie requires two discs to fit all the content, and Mini DVDs are priced about the same as movies on regular 5-inch DVDs. You can also play the Mini DVDs on your standard home DVD player. The DVD Jr. is small and lightweight—about the size of a hamburger—so you don't have to worry about causing Susie's back to hurt when you add it to all the other stuff in her backpack. (See "Family-Friendly DVD Players: Find The

Right Fit For Your Household" on page 42 to learn more about the DVD Jr.)

Check The Specs

It would be logical to think that you could judge the weight of a unit by its price and/or screen size, but this isn't necessarily true. Consider the rather expensive Toshiba 8.9-inch SD-P2600 ($599.99; www.tacp.toshiba.com). It offers features not found on most portable DVD players, including a battery with three and a half hours of play and component video output with 1,024 x 600 resolution for a superior picture. Its dimensions are 1.25 x 10.25 x 7 inches, but at just under 4 pounds, it's one of the heaviest units on the market.

Compare that to Samsung's 12-inch DVD-L1200 ($999.99; www.samsung.com). It comes with three headphone jacks, weighs 3.3 pounds, and is a manageable 1.1 x 11.9 x 8 inches.

The Moral

The weight and size of a unit are important factors to consider when deciding which portable DVD player to buy. These factors affect how your picture looks and how easy your unit is to use and carry with you to all the places you'd like to take it. Also, figure another pound or so for essential and optional accessories. Remember the AC adapter/charger, car adapter/charger, extra battery, A/V cables, remote control, headphones, and users manual. And, of course, you'll probably carry your favorite movie, photo CD, and music CD with you, as well. ce

BY LEANNA SKARNULIS

Get A Smaller Unit If . . .

- You'll always watch it solo.
- You'll carry it in your shoulder bag or backpack with your laptop.
- It will have to fit with other survival gear in a diaper bag.
- You'll likely connect it to a TV in a hotel room when you travel.
- You'd like to discourage fellow cruise passengers from rubbernecking.
- It will sit directly in front of you on your tray table during a flight.

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CE Dejargonator

Progressive Scan

Unlike an interlaced image (exaggerated in the center and left images), the entire progressive-scan image is redrawn every second. Interlaced images redraw half of the image, which can produce flicker.

Progressive scan is quickly becoming a standard feature on all but the most basic DVD players. It's an integral component in much of today's HDTV programming, and even some video game consoles are getting in on the act. To explain what it is, we'll start with the basics of how a video signal displays on-screen. Although video appears to be a constant moving image, it's actually composed of individual still pictures called frames. When shown in rapid succession—SD (standard definition) video runs at 30 frames per second—the human eye and brain assemble these images into a continuous motion picture.

SD video signals are interlaced. (Some HDTV signals are, too, but that's another story.) In an **interlaced** signal, half of the frame, also known as a field, illuminates the screen for 1/60 of a second, followed by the other half for 1/60 of a second. Because of the manner in which the frame is divided into halves, image quality is degraded by jagged edges on moving objects, annoying flicker, and loss of detail.

Progressive scan delivers frames to the screen in a slightly different fashion. Instead of illuminating the screen with 60 fields (half-frames) per second, progressive scan delivers 60 *full* frames per second. The result is far smoother motion, greater detail, and a purer, more solid look.

To see progressive scan in action, you will first need a progressive-scan source. This can be a progressive scan DVD player, a video game console adapted to output progressive scan, or an HD-TV signal source in the 720p (the "p" stands for progressive) format. This HDTV signal can originate from broadcast, cable, or satellite. 720p is one of two common HDTV formats and is used by ESPN and other content providers. You'll also have to have a TV capable of handling this increased picture information. After all, although the images are still illuminating the screen at the rate of 60 per second, each progressive-scan image contains a lot more picture data because it's a full frame instead of a half, and it takes more horsepower to get this more robust imagery onto the screen. The connection between source and television will take the form of component video, a tri-cable pathway typically color-coded red, green, and blue. Depending on the content, the improvement in image quality with progressive scan can be dramatic.

BY JERRY HATCHETT

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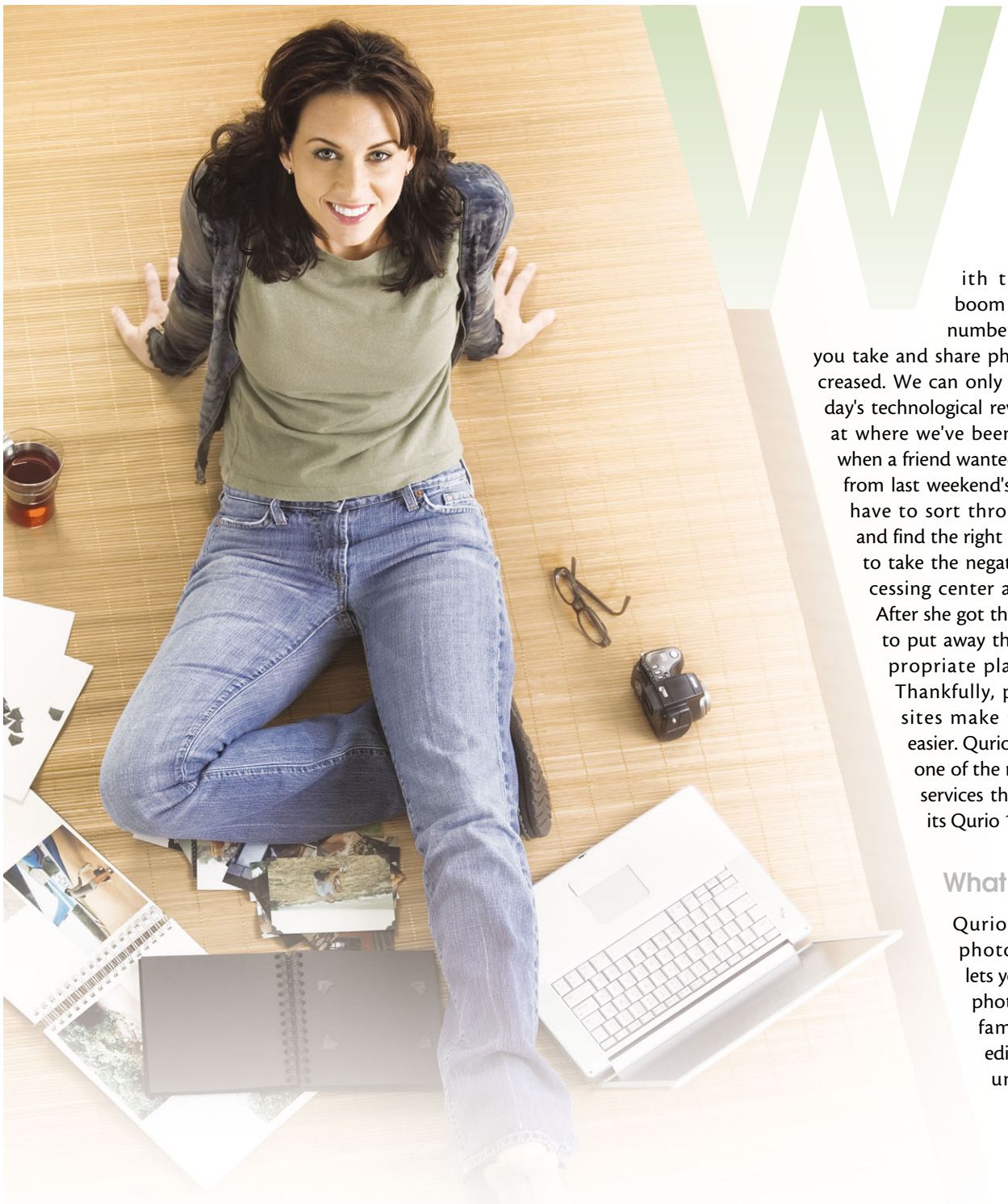
Picture This

Qurio's Software Simplifies Photo Sharing



With the digital camera boom of recent years, the number of services that let you take and share photos has greatly increased. We can only truly appreciate today's technological revolutions by looking at where we've been. In the "old" days, when a friend wanted a copy of a picture from last weekend's get-together, you'd have to sort through your negatives and find the right one. She'd then have to take the negative to a photo-processing center and order a reprint. After she got the reprint, you'd have to put away the negative in its appropriate place. What a hassle! Thankfully, photo-sharing Web sites make this process much easier. Qurio (www.qurio.com) is one of the newer photo-sharing services that is doing this with its Qurio 1.3 software.

What Is Qurio?

Qurio is a Web-based photo-sharing tool that lets you easily share digital photos with friends and family. It also lets you edit pictures and create unique photo gifts.

Qurio's Mini Photo Books offer a new way to display your photos.

Qurio is different from other photo-sharing software and Web sites, such as Shutterfly (www.shutterfly.com), Adobe Photoshop Album (www.adobe.com), and Picasa (www.picasa.com) in that your PC becomes the server for sharing photos. This means that your friends and family do not have to log into a remote server. Instead, they log directly onto your computer to view your pictures.

With Qurio, the pictures stay on your computer, making editing pictures faster and eliminating the time spent uploading pictures to the Web that other sites require. Because your PC is the server, you need a high-speed Internet connection and a computer that's always online, so your friends and family can access your photos.

Install Qurio

At press time, to create digital albums, edit pictures, and create photo gifts, you need Qurio 1.3. Qurio 1.3 requires Win-dows XP/2000, Internet Explorer 5.2 or newer, 256MB of RAM, a screen resolution of 1,024 x 768, 500MB of free hard-drive space, and a DSL (Digital Subscriber Line) or cable modem high-speed Internet connection. Check Qurio's Web site for the most recent version and system requirements.

When you've met the minimum system requirements, head to www.qurio.com and click Download Now. When the download is complete, open the file and proceed with installation.

When you start Qurio for the first time, it will ask you to select a user ID and password. Remember that other users (friends, family, and the general public) will use your user ID to view your photos, so make it easy to remember but don't use information you wouldn't feel comfortable sharing with a stranger, such as your full name, password, or address. Once you've successfully obtained your user ID and password, you're ready to begin using Qurio.

Friends and family may access photos you post on your Web site and download them to their machines or order prints using their own Web browsers. If they choose to download pictures to their machines, they may edit them and print them on their own computers. The beauty of Qurio is that it eliminates the need for family and friends to install special software to view or order prints:

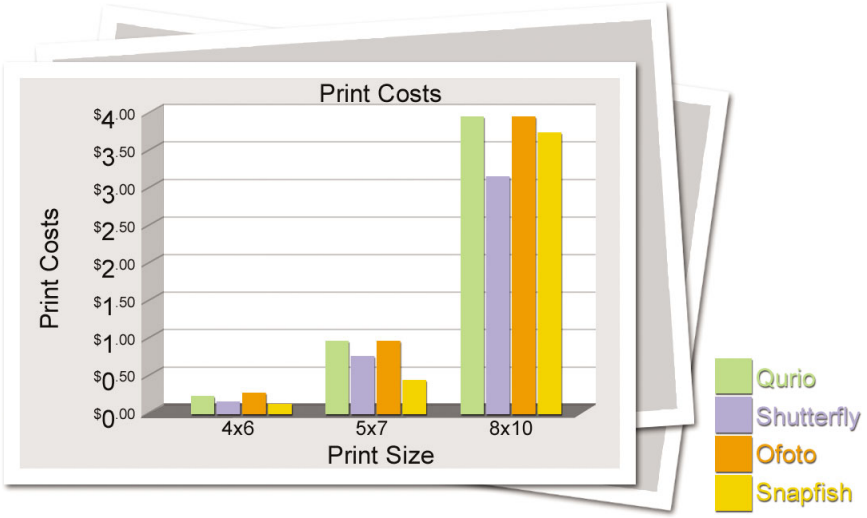
Our Mini Photo Book

We ordered a Mini Photo Book to see what the final product looks like. It is bound by a method called side stitching, which means that the pages are stapled together on the side rather than on the fold or spine. Because of this, some of the pages may appear slightly off-center. You can adjust this before printing your book by shrinking your pictures on the page and allowing for a margin. A customer-support representative at Qurio says the April release corrects this problem because the program automatically sets the correct margins. The side stitching also makes it rather difficult to open the book fully.

The print quality of the photos in the book is decent, but the printed pictures look more like a print on a color laser printer than of a high gloss photo print. The paper used in the Mini Photo Book is acid-free, archival quality paper. Unlike images you print on your inkjet printer, the pictures in your Mini Photo Book won't smudge.

Our Mini Photo Book had some errors in it, but Qurio's customer service responded quickly to fix the problems. Although it took three reprints to get it right, we're satisfied with our book and with Qurio. Qurio has assured us that this is not a common problem.

We were pleased with the Mini Photo Book we ordered. The service was easy to use, and although the book wasn't as glossy and professional looking as we would have liked, it cost only $9.99. The photo book is a keepsake that lets you commemorate special occasions, such as birthday parties, weddings, and family vacations, and there are larger, hardcover books available, as well.



This chart shows the cost of printing your photos in bulk at Qurio compared to the cost of printing at Shutterfly, Ofoto, and Snapfish.

All they need is an Internet connection and Internet Explorer 5.2 or newer.

Speed

Qurio recommends that you have a high-speed Internet connection. However, your friends and family who have dial-up Internet connections can still view your pictures, download them to print from their PCs, and order prints from Qurio.

Qurio has another cool feature that prevents your computer from slowing down during times of high traffic, say when 100 of your friends simultaneously try to access one of your pictures. Qurio set up a network of servers that makes copies of recently accessed photos on its servers. If your computer is bombarded with multiple requests, your friends will instead access Qurio's server for your popular pictures. Qurio also double-checks its copy with your copy to make sure your friends get the most recent version of the picture.

Use Qurio

Using Qurio is easy. First, you'll want to import your photos. Find the folder containing the pictures, right-click the folder, and select Import To Qurio. Qurio prompts you to enter information to identify the photos. Once you've imported the pictures, you can view your album or invite friends and family to see it.

Qurio makes it easy to import a great number of photos located in various subfolders with one easy step. For example, to bring all of the pictures in your My Pictures folder and subfolders into Qurio, follow the same steps as a regular import. Qurio creates albums using the folder names you have in My Pictures and places the appropriate photos in each album. This is especially convenient when you're setting up Qurio for the first time.

You can also use the Qurio Photo Importer, which lets you customize settings so you can add picture information such as artist, copyright, description, and keywords for each picture. This is especially helpful when you want to remember certain details about a photo or when you want to search for a photo using keywords. You can also rotate the picture and select which album you want to put it in. Look for the Qurio Photo Importer in the System Tray next to your Windows Desktop clock; click the Qurio icon to open it.

Because there are usually some pictures in our albums that we want to share and others we want to keep private, we like Qurio's ability to set permissions accordingly. After importing your pictures and organizing them into albums, you decide who, if anyone, can see them. All albums are initially set as Private, meaning that

Cost Comparison

Qurio's cost per print is in-line with other online photo-sharing sites such as Shutterfly (www.shutterfly.com), Ofoto (www.ofoto.com), and Snapfish (www.snapfish.com). Although Qurio doesn't offer discounts for bulk purchases as some sites do, its starting prices are competitive, but don't look for wallet-sized prints; Qurio doesn't sell them. All of these sites offer similar photo-editing capabilities.

Here's a table of the prices assuming you're not ordering in bulk. See the "Print Costs" chart for more information.

	Qurio	Shutterfly*	Ofoto	Snapfish*
4 x 6	$0.25	$0.29	$0.29	$0.19
5 x 7	$0.99	$0.99	$0.99	$0.95
8 x 10	$3.99	$3.99	$3.99	$3.79

*(gives discounts for volume orders)

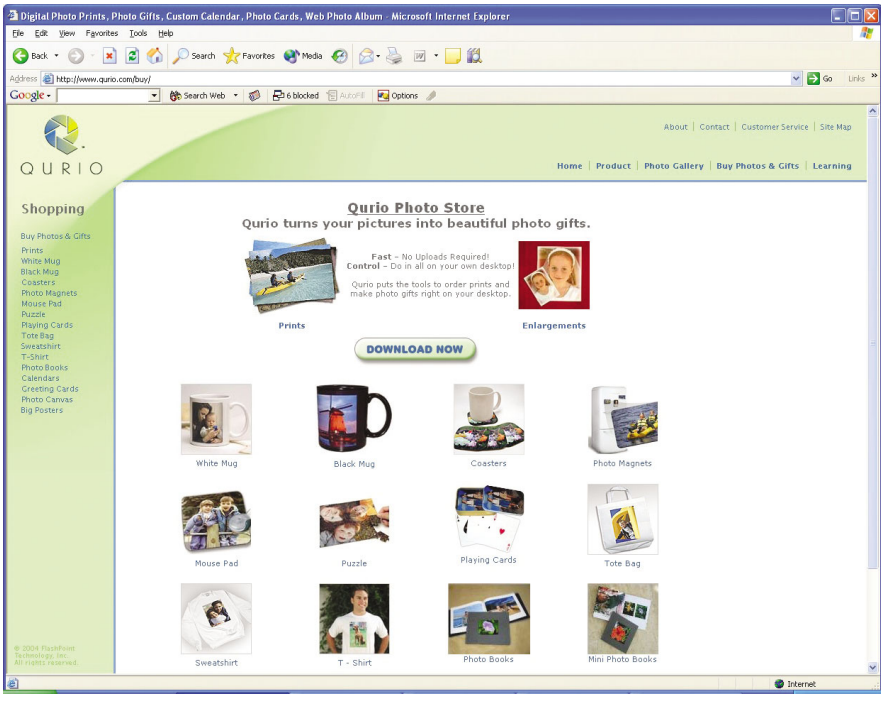
you as the owner are the only person who can view them. Therefore, if you want your friends and family to be able to see the albums you've created, you'll have to change the default setting from Private to Public. Qurio automatically changes an album to Public when you send an invitation to view that album to friends or family. When albums are set to Public, anyone who knows your unique Qurio Web address (which is set up as http://*yourusername*.quriophotos.com) can access your pictures.

The April release of Qurio lets you password protect your albums. Qurio's customer support says, "You will still be able to have public galleries for images that you want to share with everyone. But, if you have children and only want their pictures accessible to friends and family, then you can set a password for the album." By only giving the password to the people you are comfortable sharing these photos with, you can feel confident that your pictures are in safe hands.

Another way to share your photos is to list your photo site on the Qurio Photo Gallery so that everyone who visits Qurio's Web site will have the opportunity to view your photos by clicking the Photo Gallery link on the home page.

Qurio has unique and convenient features which let you share your photos with friends and family. It also eliminates the hassle of digging through your negatives, finding the one from last week's get together that your friend has been bugging you for, and giving her the negative so she can make a print copy of the picture.

BY JENNIFER JOHNSON



Qurio lets you create a variety of unique gifts from your photos.

Mini Photo Books

Qurio offers a variety of photo gifts, including the Mini Photo Book, which you create on your computer using Qurio's software. You can view and share the Mini Photo Book with friends and family online, and you can order print copies of the book. The double-sided, 20-page, soft-cover book lets you add up to 96 pictures, albeit fairly small pictures; the book is only 5 inches high x 5 inches wide.

Creating a Mini Photo Book is a fairly straightforward process. You can customize it with background colors and effects, page captions, and different layouts. Adding clip art, text, or picture effects; resizing and moving pictures; and zooming in and out of pictures are also options.

How Qurio Works

Qurio uses the concept of peer-to-peer technology. This is similar to the way in which a powerful server provides content to someone browsing the Internet. Because today's PCs are more powerful than they were in the past, home PCs can perform small tasks that used to require a server, including sharing music or photos over the Internet. Qurio takes advantage of this by giving your PC the power to share photos from your PC by setting up a peer-to-peer connection between your computer and your friend's computer.

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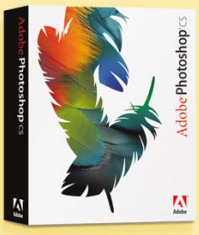

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***This is not MSRP but an average of prices from eight retail Web sites.

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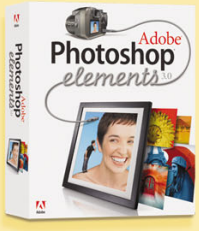

COMPILED BY JENNIFER JOHNSON

"When paired with a suitably high-end A/V receiver, the RBH CT-MAX will rock your home theater to its foundations."
- Steve Guttenberg, *c|net.com*

In either stereo or multichannel modes, the RBH excelled at producing a cleanly defined soundstage, with imaging uncluttered by any hint of a box or multiple drivers…The result is that the Compact Theater convincingly disappears as a sound source.
-Neil Gader, *The Perfect Vision Magazine*

MS-8.1

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Know How

One Problem, Three Solutions: Zoom & Crop

BY BRIAN HODGE

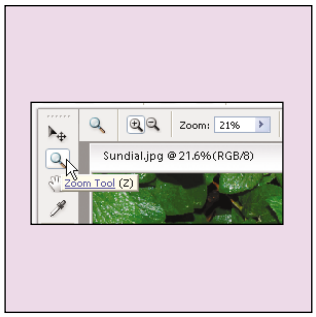
In our second installment of Know How, we'll look at two of the most basic tools in our photo editors.

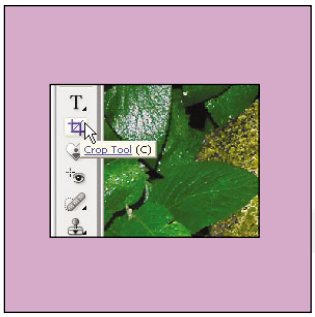
When you use zoom, you enlarge a photo in your workspace. You may need to get a closer look at small details, and many photo fixes (such as scratch repair) are easier to perform at high zoom levels. When you crop a photo, you cut away part of the original image to improve the composition of the portion you're leaving behind. Removing background clutter and other distractions can help clarify the focus on your subject.

In our illustrations, we'll be zooming in on and cropping a photo of a stone sundial to create a more interesting close-up of just one area.

Adobe Photoshop Elements 3.0

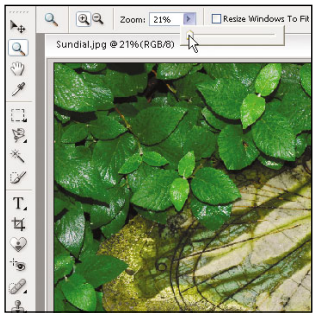
With your photo opened in the workspace, select the Zoom Tool from at or near the top of the toolbar on the left. The Zoom Tool (as well as the Crop Tool) is available in both the Quick Fix and Standard Edit views. There are several ways to zoom:

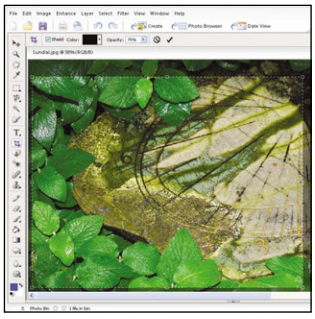




For cropping, select the Crop Tool from the toolbar.

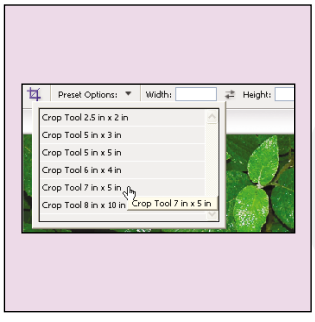
(A) Select a Zoom button with the plus (+) or minus signs (-) and click the photo to enlarge or shrink it; (B) Use the Zoom Percentage box. Type a percentage and press ENTER, or click the box's blue arrow and drag the slider to set the view up to 1,600%. For finer control, use your arrow keys.





Again, the Options bar provides multiple methods. To crop freehand, click and drag the photo to select the area you want to keep and then press ENTER.

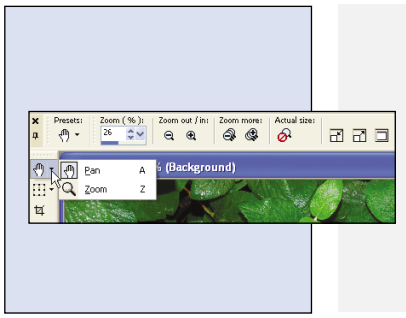
If you need to enlarge your workspace, click the buttons in the lower-left and -right corners to close the Photo Bin (possible in both views) and Palette Bin (possible in Standard Edit view only).



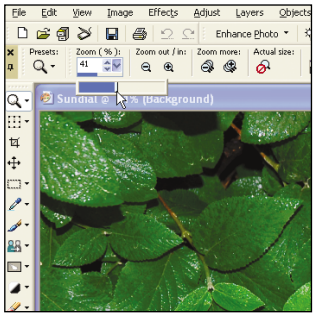
Select a size from the Preset menu or type values in the Width and Height boxes. This doesn't work quite as you may expect. As you click and drag the selection marquee over the photo, the program constrains your selection area to a fixed proportion. When you then press ENTER, it resamples the image to fit into the selected dimensions.

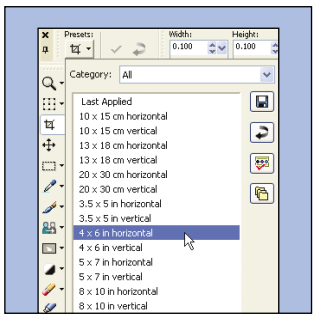
Jasc Paint Shop Pro 9

Select the Pan/Zoom Tool from the top left of the toolbar. Even on the Pan setting, the Tool Options Palette displays the various Zoom methods. Use the method you prefer.



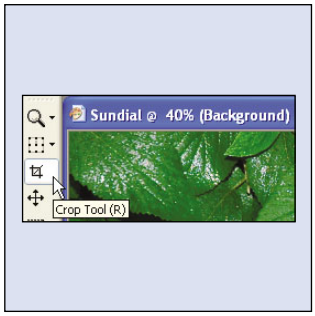
(A) For control up to 5,000%, click the arrows in the Zoom Percentage box, type a numerical setting, or drag the slider; (B) Click Zoom In/Out for 5% to 10% increments or Zoom More for larger jumps; and (C) Select the Zoom Tool from the Toolbar and click the photo to zoom in or right-click to zoom out.





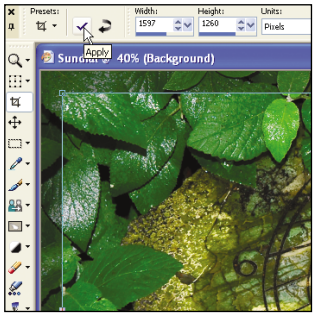
To crop to fixed dimensions, click the Presets button to open the drop-down menu and select a size, which creates a selection box on the photo.

Select the Crop Tool from the Toolbar.



Click anywhere inside the box to drag it wherever you wish and then click the Apply button.

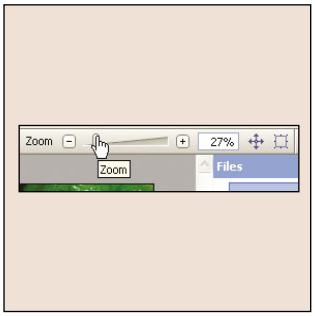
To crop freehand, click and drag the photo and then click the Apply button on the Tool Options Palette.



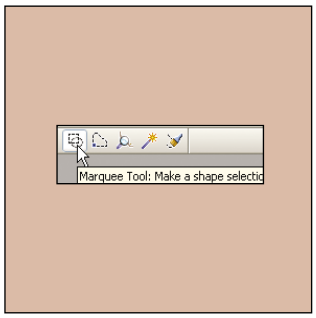
You can also drag the selection box's handles to proportionately adjust the selection area. When you click the Apply button, Paint Shop Pro resamples the selection to fit the preset dimensions.

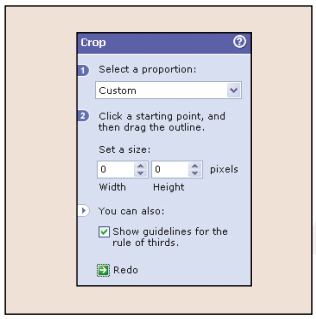
Microsoft Digital Image Pro 10

Zoom controls are at the right end of the Workspace Toolbar. Drag the slider to set the view percentage up to 2,000%, click the plus/minus buttons, type a value, and press ENTER. On the percentage box's right, the four-way arrow button snaps the picture to a full-shot view, regardless of how far you've zoomed.



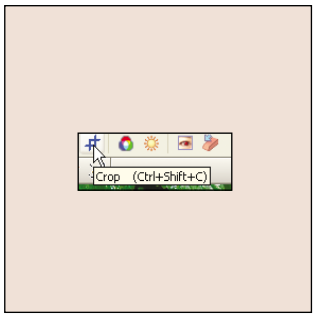
The Zoom To Selection button lets you target a specific area. Choose the Marquee Tool from the Workspace Toolbar, click and drag the photo to make your selection, and click the Zoom To Selection button.

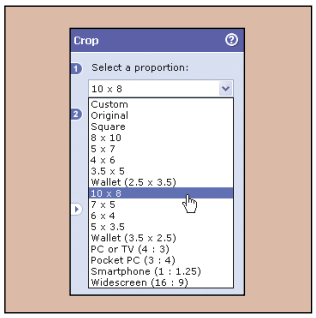




In the Task Pane, under Step 1, you'll see a drop-down menu. It defaults to Custom, which lets you choose any dimensions you want.

Select the Crop Tool from the main Toolbar.





You can also open the menu to choose a proportion preset. Notice, however, that these are proportions only, not fixed sizes in inches, etc. (If you need a specific size, after you complete the crop, choose Resize Image from the Format Menu.)

Click and drag to make the selection area. Click the Done button.

tips White Balance

1 Take Advantage Of The Auto Mode

As the name implies, Auto mode makes taking properly colored pictures automatic. Without having to manually adjust settings, the camera automatically alters colors to equalize lighting effects. You won't get the best hues or the sharpest colors, but you also won't get pictures with a completely wrong tint. For a picture in which color isn't crucial to the composition, Auto mode is probably your best and safest bet. It also serves nicely for taking a picture that spans multiple types and quantities of lighting.

2 Experiment With Manual

Instead of setting white as the neutral color, try setting blue or green or any other color as neutral. The camera, attempting to balance the light, will shade all of the pictures in the opposite color of what you have labeled as neutral. If you set green as neutral, the pictures will be tinted red, blue becomes orange, and yellow becomes purple. This lets you create some very stylized and surreal photographs.

3 Explore The Manual White-Balance Mode

In Manual, you take control of the camera's color spectrum. By telling your camera what you perceive as white, it will adjust all other colors to match your perception. Using this feature, you can capture a photo exactly as you see it, no matter the lighting. Sometimes, this can be faster than using a preset option, as you don't have to pick and choose. You know if you set it manually the colors are as true as possible. As soon as you change settings, reset your camera for the new lighting condition. Your eye will adjust to make the colors stay the same wherever you are, but your camera will not. It helps to carry around a white card to make sure you always have a way to balance your camera in any lighting context.

4 Use Flash & Shade Settings

For backlit pictures, the Flash and Shade settings work well. They add reds and yellows similar to Cloudy but will imbue the picture with more of those colors than Cloudy. In a backlit setting, the subject, not directly exposed to light, will be tinted blue. Shade and Flash add more red to the subject, which eliminates the cold blue. With a flash (not the white balance Flash setting), color and detail can wash out, but Shade and Flash help maintain the natural qualities of the picture.

5 Use The Cloudy Setting

On interior shots or noncloudy days, use the Cloudy setting. On a cloudy day, there is no direct source of light. Instead of the yellowish-reddish light of a candle, an interior light, or the sun, the light, and consequently your picture, will have blue qualities. To offset this, the Cloudy setting inserts slight reds and yellows to create a more balanced look. When you use this feature in atmospheres other than cloudy or overcast days, environments will look warmer and cheeks will look rosier. This is also effective at giving pictures a tinge of that aged yellow look.

BY PAUL ROGERS

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PICTURES - MUSIC - DATA

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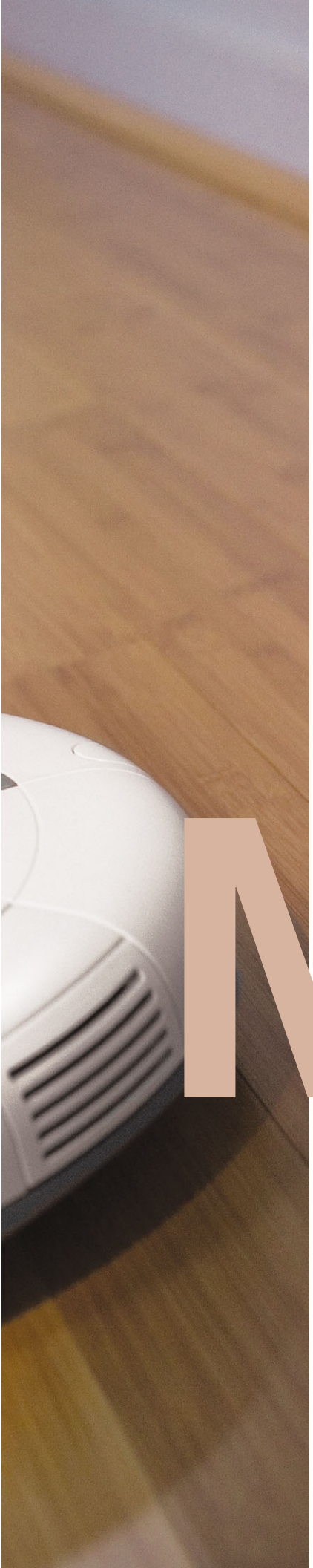
Go, Robot!

iRobot's Roomba Discovery Wants To Catch Your Dirt



Most of us, when we were little, firmly believed that eventually robots would clean up after us, freeing us from endless dirty dishes and bags of smelly trash. And then what happened? You grew up and got a place of your own to clean, and now that the future is here, you can't help feeling a little . . . cheated.

When iRobot introduced the Roomba in 2002, the general consensus was that it was a great idea but still something of a novelty item. Now in their second generation, Roombas have had several refinements, so it's time to put the higher-end Roomba Discovery to the test.

The Roomba & Its Accessories

The Roomba looks like a beefed-up Frisbee. It's 13 inches wide and 3.25 inches tall (when settled on its flexible wheels) with a curved row of four control buttons the size of quarters.

Setup is simple: Flip it over onto its back and snap in the yellow, brick-like nickel-metal hydride battery pack. Flip it upright again, and it's ready for charging. You can do this one of two ways: Plug the charger cable directly into the vacuum's socket or plug the cable into the Home Base and let the Roomba charge through its pair of contact points.

Although it isn't essential for use, the Home Base can act as the Roomba's docking station. As long as they're in the same vicinity, the Roomba can usually lock onto the Home Base's infrared signal and find its way back to the Home Base when it's finished working or if it needs to recharge in the middle of a big job (or "mission," in Roomba-speak). It takes about three

hours to go from dead to fully charged, which will give you up to two hours of continuous operation.

If you don't want to use the Home Base, you can use the included wall mount to store your unit. A replacement filter, a remote control, and two Virtual Walls also come standard.

Virtual Walls are clever little devices that run on two D batteries and emit an IR (infrared) beam that bars the Roomba's way. If you want to block a wide hallway, for instance, place a Virtual Wall on one side of the opening, aim it across, set the range (0 to 3 feet, 4 to 7 feet, or 8-plus feet), and turn it on. If you forget to turn it off, no problem. It runs on a two-and-a-half-hour timer.

The Dirty Work

To put the Roomba to work, set it in the middle of the room's largest area of open floor space, press the Power button, and then press the Clean button. After a triumphant fanfare of electronic beeps, the unit spirals outward. Once it encounters an obstacle, such as furniture, it starts finding its way around the room in what looks like a random cleaning pattern, but it isn't. The Roomba's navigation methods are derived from minesweeping technology that iRobot developed for the U.S. government. When the Roomba calculates it has cleaned the area (it's likely that it will have covered most of the floor more than once), it automatically stops or returns to Home Base.

iRobot Roomba Discovery
$249.99
www.irobot.com

The process certainly takes longer than it would if you were using an upright or canister vacuum . . . but then, those require constant attention and effort and precious time out of your day.

The Roomba has two other options in addition to the basic Clean mode. Press the Spot button, and the unit vacuums an area with a 3-foot diameter, spiraling first outward and then back inward. The Max button sends the Roomba on the ultimate mission: cleaning for two hours (or until its battery depletes), regardless of how many times it may cover the room.

Surface recommendations. The Roomba needs a reasonably level floor surface; however, if you can handle it with an upright or canister vacuum, it shouldn't pose any problems for the Roomba. The one exception is deep-pile carpet. iRobot doesn't recommend using the unit on deep-pile, and our tests bear that out. Also, the Roomba automatically adjusts how it cleans when it moves from bare floors of wood, linoleum, and tile to low- and medium-pile carpets and their area-rug equivalents.

Sensory Overload

To intelligently approach its tasks, the Roomba uses three types of sensors.

Bump sensors. Watch the Roomba in action, and you'll notice it's rather aggressive and even seems inquisitive at times. Rimming almost the front half of the unit is a crescent-moon-shaped bumper that flexes inward and won't scuff what it hits.

Bumping into objects or furniture is how the Roomba learns about its surroundings. It gathers information about its environment at a rate of 67 times per second. The bump sensors, as well as calculations the unit makes as it travels, help it map where in a room it's

Tips & Precautions

Because the Roomba isn't like upright or canister models, you need to approach cleaning with a Roomba differently than you would with your normal vacuum.

When most people need to vacuum, they tend to pick up clutter and move items as they go. You need to do this before you set the Roomba on its mission to provide the Roomba access to the largest amount of floor space as possible. You'll also need to pick up such loose items as socks, which can hang up underneath the unit and stop its mission.

Monitor the Roomba's progress the first time you use it in a room and be on the lookout for trouble spots. It may be just low enough to get wedged under a kitchen counter overhang, cross braces beneath an end table, or another low-resting piece of furniture.

Look for potential traps, too. We watched the unit scoot under a cabinet and then lock into a repeating pattern without ever extracting itself. Once you're aware of trouble spots, you can block access to them next time.

The Roomba requires more frequent maintenance than a regular vacuum. Its bin isn't nearly the size of a vacuum bag, so empty it after every two or three missions, and empty it more if the Roomba has to clean a higher than normal amount of messes.

The Roomba's manual recommends cleaning its brushes after every 10 missions. If you have a pet that sheds a lot, we recommend cleaning it more often. The brushes can pick up a great deal of hair in a hurry.

been, where there are obstacles, and where it still needs to go.

If the unit relied on noncontact mapping methods, such as optical sensors, it would stop at such nonobstacles as dust ruffles and wouldn't travel underneath beds.

Dirt sensors. Located in the dirt path, over the beater brushes, is a pair of sonic sensors that "listen" to the cleaning process. They're sensitive to sound waves and can hear concentrations of particles as small as ground pepper. When these sensors identify a flurry of grit, the Roomba goes into Dirt Detect mode (the blue Dirt Detect light comes on) and cleans the immediate area with greater intensity.

Cliff sensors. Mounted under the front edge, these are optical sensors that prevent the Roomba from taking a fatal tumble down a flight of stairs. However, be cautious when using the Roomba near stairs with rounded edges, on slippery surfaces, or on light-colored floors, as these sensors may be slightly less effective in these situations.

The Cleanup

Because of its rounded shape, the Roomba has no snout to poke into corners. You have to rely on its whisk brush to pull in as much dirt as it can reach in a corner, and this brush may not catch everything. It doesn't clean stairways, and with no socket for a hose and attachments, you can't use it on furniture, upholstery, blinds, or any other higher-elevation use that a conventional vacuum can handle.

But as an automated unit that will handle general cleaning for nearly all of your floor space, the Roomba does what it promises. We were impressed by how much it dredged up from floors, carpets, and rugs that looked clean to the eye. If you invest enough time to learn its tendencies and quirks, you can save yourself hours of vacuuming time and effort in the long run.

BY BRIAN HODGE

The Roomba Torture Test

To see how the Roomba Discovery would perform under different circumstances, we turned it loose on a variety of messes that we re-created on various floor surfaces.

For our messes, we used eight dry substances. For consistency from one surface to the next, we measured out a roughly equal portion.

For our surfaces, we used bare floor and low- and medium-pile carpets. The carpets we used were sample sections, so we could shake them out to see what, if anything, had been left in the nap. We alternated between the Roomba's Spot mode and using the remote control to drive the unit over the mess.

Even though iRobot discourages using the Roomba on deep-pile carpet, we were prepared to give it a whirl but quickly discovered why it's not recommended. The Roomba simply couldn't move through the carpet. Imagine a dachshund in a foot of mud, and you should get the picture.

Dry Coffee Grounds (1/2 Shot)

Bare Floor
Sent quite a bit skittering away, creating a wider mess.

Low-Pile Carpet
Clean, thorough pickup.

Medium-Pile Carpet
Decent pickup, but grounds started to work down into the nap.

Flour (3/4 Shot)

Bare Floor
Dreadful. It sucked up quite a bit but created an ever-worsening pattern of tire tracks that required a mop to clean. Worse, flour kept sifting out of the Roomba and, in general, made such an unholy mess that we abandoned further flour tests.

Low-Pile Carpet
n/a

Medium-Pile Carpet
n/a

Pet Hair (Several Tufts)

Bare Floor
Missed almost all. Airflow kept blowing tufts away.

Low-Pile Carpet
Quick, thorough pickup.

Medium-Pile Carpet
Quick, thorough pickup.

Popcorn (Popped—Crumpled Handful)

Bare Floor
Kicked several pieces away, but easy to chase them down with remote control. Complete success apparent until we realized that the unit had corralled most of the pieces underneath instead of sucking them up.

Low-Pile Carpet
100% pickup.

Medium-Pile Carpet
100% pickup.

Bare Floor
Several grains skittered away, but easy to get everything using remote.

Low-Pile Carpet
Got most; some grains remained after several back-and-forth passes.

Medium-Pile Carpet
Good surface job, but on shakeout we discovered lots of grit left behind.

Sand (1/2 Shot)

Bare Floor
Lots of shooting rice. Oddly, seemed to jolt Roomba out of Spot mode, and it started roving.

Low-Pile Carpet
Rice still wanted to skitter away but not nearly as badly. Got it all.

Medium-Pile Carpet
Rice and Roomba started to cooperate. Got every grain; no escape attempts.

Rice (Uncooked—1/2 Shot)

Bare Floor
Airflow kicked it around substantially, requiring extensive remote chase down.

Low-Pile Carpet
Reasonably thorough pickup.

Medium-Pile Carpet
Passable job; still fine bits and dust left.

Sawdust (3/4 Shot)

Bare Floor
Airflow kicked pieces around substantially, requiring extensive remote chase down.

Low-Pile Carpet
100% pickup.

Medium-Pile Carpet
100% pickup.

Shredded Paper (Packed Shot)

The Roomba Torture Test:

Substance Summary

Based on the results of our tests, the substances that the Roomba vacuumed up were, from easiest to hardest:

1. Shredded Paper
2. Pet Hair
3. Rice
4. Popcorn
5. Sawdust
6. Dry Coffee Grounds
7. Sand
8. Flour

Of course, there's much more to it than a simple ranking. Items two through six could be shuffled into nearly any order because the Roomba reacted similarly to all of them. They were reasonably easy to clean on low- and medium-pile carpets, but the Roomba's airflow had a tendency to blow very fine or lightweight substances across a bare floor. We also used fairly heavy concentrations of our grittier substances—worse than you'd likely find in one spot on a household floor under average conditions.

The Roomba Torture Test:

Surface Summary

Based on the results of our testing, the floor surfaces that the Roomba cleaned were, from easiest to hardest:

1. Low-Pile Carpet
2. Medium-Pile Carpet
3. Bare Floor
4. Deep-Pile Carpet
(not recommended by iRobot)

As with the Substance Summary, this is a general ranking, and some substance and surface combinations are exceptions to this list. For example, rice was easier to pick up on medium-pile carpet than low-pile, and the Roomba picked up sand on a bare floor more thoroughly than it did on carpet.

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Living Smart At Playa Vista

A New California Community Brings Cutting-Edge Technology Home

Just 40 years after "The Jetsons" first invited us into a futuristic community where talking robomaids and flying cars were the norm, a planned community in southern California was born that is not so far off from the animated world Hanna-Barbera envisioned.

Located on the west side of Los Angeles, the new town, Playa Vista, welcomed its first residents in the fall of 2003. The project, which is still under development, is currently home to roughly 2,500 people, with plans for a total residential population of 10,000 when the project is finished in 2010 (about 50 years ahead of the Jetsons' imagined life in 2062).

Playa Vista's planners are experimenting with a whole new model for urban living, a model that prioritizes technology and convenience. While residents do not yet have their own versions of Rosie, the Jetsons' humanlike robot maid, they can opt to have appliances and technology upgrades installed that do everything from press their clothes to cook their dinners while they're away from home. And while flying cars aren't on the horizon just yet, quiet, open-air, zero-emission EVs (electric vehicles), which are just slightly larger than golf carts, are commonly seen cruising along the Playa Vista streets. They are used exclusively by the Playa Vista maintenance staff, and residents can finance them along with their home loans and then receive preferred parking privileges. Because 90% of the parking at Playa Vista is underground, cars mostly remain out of sight in this pedestrian-friendly community.

Despite being only two years old, Playa Vista already has a long and complicated history. First envisioned in 1978, the development, which is housed on the former site of the famed actor/industrialist/recluse Howard Hughes' aviation business, was originally conceived as a city within a city. The designs called for modern high-rise office buildings accompanied by roughly 7,000 housing units. Plans for several hundred new boat slips at neighboring Marina del Rey were included, as well as 72 protected acres for a nature preserve.

It took six years for the CCC (California Coastal Commission) to approve the project, and by then, the plans had expanded to include nearly 9,000 homes, 840 boat slips, and a protected, 175-acre marshland in the Ballona Wetlands.

Court battles related to environmental concerns and other issues raised by neighboring communities bogged

down the development for more than a decade after the CCC green-lighted Playa Vista in 1984.

In 1997, nearly 20 years after attempts to found Playa Vista began, the original developer succumbed to the financial pressures of litigation and other delays and defaulted on payments to most of its lenders, thereby losing its stake in the future of the property. A group, including investment bankers and a union pension fund, purchased the property and proceeded with the current plans for development, which prioritize public spaces, maximize private spaces, and forbid any building from standing more than four stories high.

Playa Vista's president Steve Soboroff describes his town as "a model for urban living, bringing together the best of the Westside: dream homes near the beach, cutting-edge technology, and neighborhood charm—all close to where people work."

A Strong Backbone

The key to the "cutting-edge technology" Soboroff refers to begins with the powerful wired backbone built in to every home. Fifteen developers are building properties at Playa Vista, and each one is required to fulfill technical specifications that leave the homes ready for just about anything. Every room in every home has at least one universal outlet which provides voice and data and two video lines. On move-in day, residents can essentially flip a switch—or plug in their TVs, computers, or other devices—and receive high-speed Internet access, digital cable, and TiVo in every room without running cables, drilling holes, calling tech support, or relying on old, faulty wiring to dial up.

A wireless router is also standard, so residents with Wi-Fi-enabled devices can get online from anywhere, immediately, from day one. The initial cost of the wiring is minimal compared to what it would cost to upgrade the wiring later, and the expense is simply rolled into the purchase price of the property. The monthly fees for services such as cable Internet access are included in the monthly master association dues paid by every household. So, on top of easy access and a discounted rate, residents never have to see another bill from their cable company or ISP again. Derek Fraychineaud, director of construction management at Playa Vista, says the master association dues are $190

per month and include unlimited use of the public amenities such as the health and fitness center, three swimming pools, meeting rooms, 30 parks, game rooms, use of a copier, and a private Dolby THX theater, among other things.

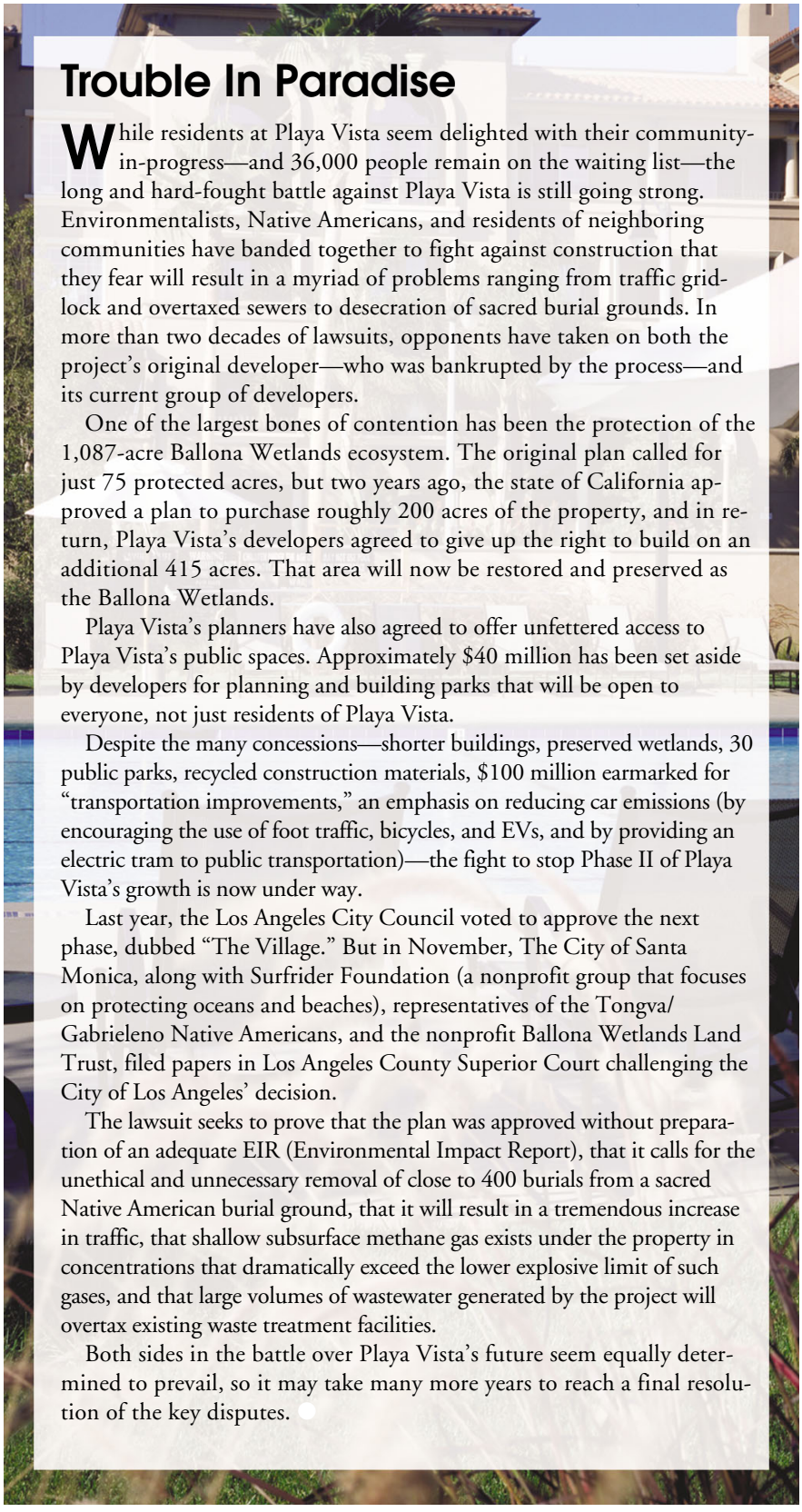
Fraychineaud says, "Because we have this backbone, it opens the door to different technologies, such as lighting control, home automation, and smart appliances. All of this cool stuff means that when you move into your home, your home is fully networked."

Residents can use the network for simple things, such as printer and file sharing, or for more high-end tasks, such as total home automation.

"You have the option and the ability to control all of the functions in your home using the home network, from the audio/video entertainment system to the climate controls," says Fraychineaud. "You can do nanny cams, monitor your security system—turn it on, turn it off, see who's at your front door—even while you're at work. If you were to purchase smart appliances or Internet-enabled appliances, you could use them right out of the box, as well."

Your Own Tech Guru

Each resident can choose how much or how little to use her high-tech home's capabilities. And to help her make choices and get set up, Playa Vista has contracted with CompUSA to offer a service it calls Technology Concierge. Every resident of Playa Vista can call the Technology Concierge for help and advice with anything technology-related at no charge. Need help setting up your wireless network? No problem. The Technology Concierge will come do it for you. Tired of pulling the string on your floor-to-ceiling windows blinds? No problem. The technology concierge will help you select and install automatic blinds, which you can operate remotely.



Trouble In Paradise

While residents at Playa Vista seem delighted with their community-in-progress—and 36,000 people remain on the waiting list—the long and hard-fought battle against Playa Vista is still going strong. Environmentalists, Native Americans, and residents of neighboring communities have banded together to fight against construction that they fear will result in a myriad of problems ranging from traffic gridlock and overtaxed sewers to desecration of sacred burial grounds. In more than two decades of lawsuits, opponents have taken on both the project's original developer—who was bankrupted by the process—and its current group of developers.

One of the largest bones of contention has been the protection of the 1,087-acre Ballona Wetlands ecosystem. The original plan called for just 75 protected acres, but two years ago, the state of California approved a plan to purchase roughly 200 acres of the property, and in return, Playa Vista's developers agreed to give up the right to build on an additional 415 acres. That area will now be restored and preserved as the Ballona Wetlands.

Playa Vista's planners have also agreed to offer unfettered access to Playa Vista's public spaces. Approximately $40 million has been set aside by developers for planning and building parks that will be open to everyone, not just residents of Playa Vista.

Despite the many concessions—shorter buildings, preserved wetlands, 30 public parks, recycled construction materials, $100 million earmarked for "transportation improvements," an emphasis on reducing car emissions (by encouraging the use of foot traffic, bicycles, and EVs, and by providing an electric tram to public transportation)—the fight to stop Phase II of Playa Vista's growth is now under way.

Last year, the Los Angeles City Council voted to approve the next phase, dubbed "The Village." But in November, The City of Santa Monica, along with Surfrider Foundation (a nonprofit group that focuses on protecting oceans and beaches), representatives of the Tongva/Gabrieleno Native Americans, and the nonprofit Ballona Wetlands Land Trust, filed papers in Los Angeles County Superior Court challenging the City of Los Angeles' decision.

The lawsuit seeks to prove that the plan was approved without preparation of an adequate EIR (Environmental Impact Report), that it calls for the unethical and unnecessary removal of close to 400 burials from a sacred Native American burial ground, that it will result in a tremendous increase in traffic, that shallow subsurface methane gas exists under the property in concentrations that dramatically exceed the lower explosive limit of such gases, and that large volumes of wastewater generated by the project will overtax existing waste treatment facilities.

Both sides in the battle over Playa Vista's future seem equally determined to prevail, so it may take many more years to reach a final resolution of the key disputes.

Because of the shortage of new housing in the Los Angeles area, and because of Playa Vista's excellent location and amenities, demand for units far outstrips availability. Currently, more than 36,000 people are on the waiting list for Playa Vista properties, which haven't even been built yet.

Stephanie Goddard, a 32-year-old public relations executive and mother of 2-year-old Ryan, was among the first residents of Playa Vista. She and her husband were on the waiting list for two years and then participated in multiple 300-person lotteries in a park in Playa Vista before they finally had the chance to purchase their condominium.

Goddard and her family have been living at Playa Vista for just over a year now and feel delighted with their choice.

"The biggest daily perk," says Goddard, "is that we are all wireless in our home. We have a desktop, but then my husband and I also have laptops, so we can go anywhere in our condo and link up. On the days I work from home, I can sit on the couch, in bed, or on the patio and still be fully connected."

Goddard employed the Technology Concierge to get her home network up and running. "They had somebody come out and talk to us about what we were looking to do, what our requirements were, and then they got us set up. We incorporated a fax as a separate line, got our wireless access hooked up with the right software—we basically had one person come in, and that person organized the others to come and set things up. It wasn't very difficult and there was no extra fee."

Goddard hasn't taken advantage of the extreme gadgets her home could support, such as Internet-enabled refrigerators (which run from $7,000 to $15,000) or the Polara refrigerated range from Whirlpool ($1,499; www.whirlpool.com), which can keep a dish cold and then cook it, keep it warm, and re-refrigerate it, depending on the instructions it's fed remotely via a cell phone, PC, or PDA.

Fraychineaud says some residents at Playa Vista are spending up to $70,000 on technology upgrades when they move in. Most residents spend that money on home entertainment systems.

No More Dinner Bells

Angela Glover, a 47-year-old entrepreneur, moved into a 3,000-square-foot penthouse property in Playa Vista last year with her husband and her mother. She spent roughly $30,000 on technological amenities ranging from surround sound to a paging and intercom system.

"Now I don't have to yell up to my mother when dinner is ready," she says.

Glover's condo, which she bought for about $900,000, has already doubled in value. On her technology wish list is a security add-on featured called The Icebox, with which she could monitor the exterior of her property via live video feeds sent directly from security cameras to her kitchen.

"It hooks up to your fridge," says Glover. "It's like a little TV, and then there are cameras mounted on the outside of the unit and a mini plasma TV under the counter, so we can monitor everything from inside." She plans to purchase the system next year.

Dream Machines

For manufacturers of smart-living appliances, Playa Vista's approach to high-tech living is a rare recipe for success. The three major obstacles facing the makers of smart-living devices marketed to the general public are insufficient wiring, cost, and an attitude among consumers of skepticism or confusion about the viability of such devices.

Steve Duthie, media relations manager for Whirlpool, says his company has participated in some pilot projects in cooperation with the Internet Home Alliance, a nonprofit cross-industry network of Fortune 200 companies, which conducts research about emerging home technology markets.

"We're trying to determine whether or not there's any utility to them and whether people will pay for them," says Duthie. "So far, they look cool and act cool, but no one is clamoring for them."

Duthie sees the primary hurdle consumers face when considering a product such as Whirlpool's Polara refrigerated range or its Personal Valet unit ($1,199), which presses and freshens garments and comes standard in some Playa Vista homes, as more a conceptual rather than a financial issue.

"In order to sell a consumer on a completely new idea, you have to break through a mindset. An appliance like the Polara, it's something that people can't conjure up an image of. And they think to themselves, 'Well, I'm not sure I'd feel comfortable leaving the home with a meal cooking in the oven.' But our testers absolutely loved them. They didn't want us to take them away," says Duthie.

Unlike your average consumer, who may balk at the idea of taking the leap toward unusual and pricey appliances that make big, hard-to-believe promises, the residents of Playa Vista are well-prepared to imagine such things. They are walked through the selection and setup process by their Technology Concierge and live in homes that can handle the newest creations any appliance manufacturer can throw at them. This eliminates the two biggest obstacles vendors face in making sales—skepticism and outdated wiring—which makes Playa Vistans an excellent market for companies who want to find early adopters for their products.

The extent to which smart appliances and high-tech amenities are available to Playa Vista residents in their homes is, at the moment, only limited by their budgets. And plans are in the works to add more technological conveniences in common areas, as well.

Playa Vista has put an emphasis on creating an old-fashioned feeling of community in new-fashioned ways. In addition to building parks, pools, a library, and a community center, there are plans to create Wi-Fi hotspots in all of the town's public parks, a move which is designed to get more people out of doors, so they can interact with their neighbors.

Goddard is eager for the park-based Wi-Fi to be deployed.

A Day In The Park

"I'm really excited," she says, "because as the development grows, I could sit in the park with my son and check my email. That's part of the future vision; we're the first phase of Playa Vista."

Also among new projects at Playa Vista, is PlayaLink, a community Web site.

Kristin Ramsey, who left Coca-Cola to become Playa Vista's vice president of marketing, says, "PlayaLink is for residents only. It's a place where residents can go and, via the message board, talk to each other about everything from the new park that's opening to a Mommy and Me group. We also work with partners outside of our community and offer to them to come in and reach this new group of consumers."

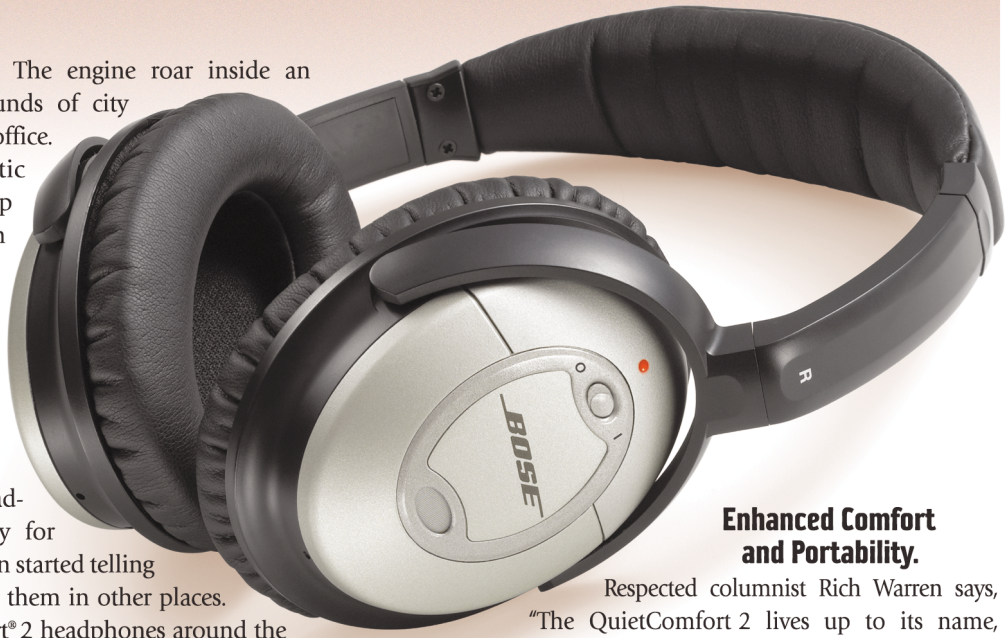
Over the next five years, Playa Vista will continue to grow and expand, adding several thousand housing units, retail spaces, a fire station, and a new campus for video game developer Electronic Arts. While the three-hour-a-day, three-day-a-week work week of George Jetson's world does not seem to be on the horizon for Playa Vista residents, the smart amenities they enjoy at home and in the community growing up around them seem to more than make up for it. ce

BY NAOMI GRAYCHASE

Quietly Setting A Whole New Standard.

Experience the unmatched combination of noise reduction and audio performance of our QuietComfort® 2 Acoustic Noise Cancelling® headphones.

Unwanted noise is everywhere. The engine roar inside an airplane cabin. The blaring sounds of city streets. The annoying din of the office. Bose® QuietComfort® 2 Acoustic Noise Cancelling headphones help you hush them all. Put them on and slip into a safe haven – where you can relax and enjoy peace and solitude or listen to your favorite music.



Proven Noise Reduction Technology.

Our original noise-reducing headphones were designed primarily for airplane travelers. But owners soon started telling us how much they enjoyed using them in other places. So we designed our QuietComfort® 2 headphones around the same patented technology that electronically identifies and dramatically reduces noise, while faithfully preserving the music, movie dialogue or tranquility you desire. The *Philadelphia Daily News* says that "Even in the noisiest environment, wearing these phones creates a calming, quiet zone for easy listening or just snoozing."

Our Best Sound Ever.

QuietComfort® 2 headphones deliver the best audio performance we've ever developed for headphones. Highs are impressively crisp and clean. Lows are deep and enveloping. Vocals are reproduced with lifelike authenticity. When audio critic Wayne Thompson heard our QuietComfort® 2 headphones, he reported, "Bose engineers have made major improvements." Whether you're looking for noise reduction or high-performance headphones for music, we think you'll agree – QuietComfort® 2 headphones capture the essence of serenity and sound.

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Respected columnist Rich Warren says, "The QuietComfort 2 lives up to its name, enveloping you in blissful sound in the utmost comfort. It's easy to forget they're on your head." To enjoy peace and tranquility, simply turn them on. To add Bose quality sound, attach the included audio cord and connect them to a home stereo, laptop computer, portable CD/DVD/MP3 player or in-flight audio system. When you're done, their convenient fold-flat design allows for easy storage in the slim carrying case.

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We don't expect you to take our word for how dramatically our headphones reduce noise, how clean and full the music sounds or how comfortably they fit. So we invite you to try them for 30 days, risk free. If you can live without them, return them for a full refund.

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tips Energy Efficiency At Home

1 Change Your View

With both digital cameras and digital camcorders, the LCD screen consumes a huge amount of energy. Many people prefer to use the LCD to frame their shots, but shutting off the LCD and using the old-fashioned viewfinder instead can extend battery life. If your camera won't let you turn off the LCD, dim the screen until you can't see the picture anymore.

2 Use Your Sleep Timer

If you like to fall asleep watching a movie, set your TV's sleep timer to shut your TV off after the movie will end. If you know that no matter how hard you try to stay awake, you fall asleep 10 minutes after going to bed, set your sleep timer to turn your TV off 15 or 20 minutes after you crawl into bed. You'll save power, and you'll likely get a better night of sleep, as well.

3 Let Your Electronics Take A Nap

Your computer, especially your monitor, consumes a lot of power. Put your monitor or computer in hibernation mode to save energy. Hibernation mode, which doesn't take more than a few seconds to turn on, saves your data and then turns your computer off. When you turn it back on, the computer returns to what you were working on instead of restarting. Set your computer to hibernate after a few minutes of idle time. If you prefer manual control, manually turn your monitor off as soon as you're done.

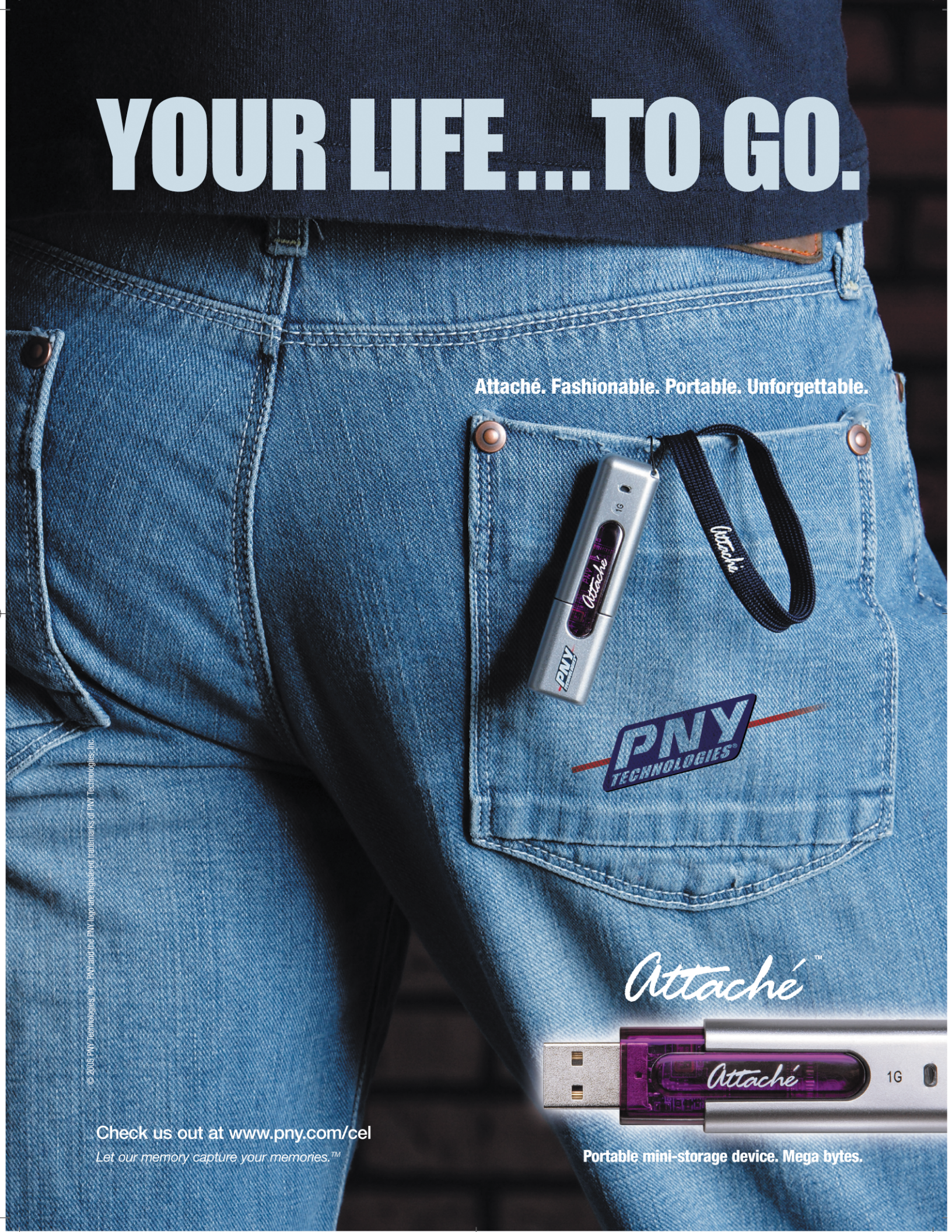
4 Choose Efficient Electronics

When buying new equipment, look for electronics with the Energy Star label. Household products with the Energy Star must meet strict energy efficiency guidelines set by the U.S. Department of Energy and the Environmental Protection Agency. These units often come equipped with more efficient standby modes. We also recommend choosing flat-screen monitors and TVs over bulky CRTs (cathode-ray tubes), printers that have duplex-printing capabilities, and inkjet printers instead of laser printers.

5 Turn It Off

Just as we are careful to turn a light off when leaving the room, we should consistently turn off electronics when we are done using them. After watching a DVD, don't just stop the disc and leave the room to do something else. Get up and turn the TV and DVD player off or at least to standby mode. Shut off printers and scanners when you finish using them. Save your video games and shut off the console instead of leaving the game on pause or in idle if you won't play it again for a while. If you don't use your fax machine often, turn the machine off until you are expecting one.

BY PAUL ROGERS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First Glimpse Advertising Section

This special advertising section presents the latest consumer electronics products now coming on the market.
Browse through these First Glimpse pages to learn about new products before they appear on your local store shelves.

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Philips Streamium MX600i Home Cinema System

Philips Streamium MX6000i Home Cinema System
MSRP: $799.99
www.streamium.com

Options & Innovations

The Philips MX6000i Streamium home theater system provides consumers with a world of home entertainment options and the latest audio and video innovations. With the ability to stream audio and video content from the PC or Internet, the MX6000i provides consumers with the ultimate choice in home cinema entertainment. Additionally, the system features a five-disc progressive scan DVD player and more than 450W of premium sound quality.

Connecting Consumers With PC & Online Content Wherever, Whenever

- Allows for wireless steaming of JPEG (Joint Photographic Experts Group), MP3, MP3PRO, MPEG, DivX (Digital Video Express), and XviD from the PC or Internet.
- Access attractive online content from Philips service partners, including Yahoo!, iFilm, Live365.com, Radio Free Virgin, Playhouse Radio, MusicMatch, and Andante.

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Unparalleled Audio Quality

- Six integrated 75W (450 total watts) audio amplifiers drive the speakers and two subwoofers built into the columns.
- Dolby Digital, Dolby ProLogic II, and DTS decoding ensures delivery of highly accurate and well-defined soundscapes.

Crisp, Clear Video Images

- The MX6000i features progressive-scan technology, which ensures the viewer will enjoy a crisp, clear viewing environment.

Sophisticated Style & Design

- The modern lines and simple front panel of the MX6000i are designed to appeal to consumers who appreciate good looks as well as functionality.

Wireless Technology

- Allows consumers to wirelessly transfer content to the device through Wi-Fi technology (802.11g).

Philips Connected Planet

- The Streamium MX6000i is part of Philips Connected Planet Vision, where consumers are able to access and enjoy content anywhere, anytime, any place, instantly, intuitively and spontaneously, with the use of broadband-enabled wireless connectivity.

PHILIPS

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Paradigm Thinks Outside The Box With Its New Compact Theater Line

Cinema 110 CT
(Television not included)

Paradigm Compact Theater
MSRP: $499 to $799
www.paradigm.com

What do you think of when you hear the phrase "home theater in a box"? Most likely, you think of a so-so receiver and media player with tinny-sounding satellites thrown in almost as an afterthought. Do you feel that you need to settle for low-quality speakers to achieve a low-cost complete home theater system? Think again.

Paradigm shows how it's done with its new line of 5.1 Compact Theater systems: Cinema 70 CT, Cinema 90 CT, and Cinema 110 CT. These are Paradigm's most affordable complete and compact speaker systems to date and feature the company's award-winning Monitor Series technology. With the Cinema CT line, Paradigm delivers real audiophile-quality sound at really modest prices.

Paradigm displays its commitment to affordable high-end products by giving you three different CT systems to choose from. Studio apartment dwellers and gamers will revel in the high-end sound the Cinema 70 system provides-four award winning Cinema 70 satellites and the Cinema CC (center channel), together with a compact subwoofer, bring multidimensional sound to games and movies.

Then there's the dream system, Cinema 90 CT: two slightly larger Cinema 90 satellites up front and a Cinema CC are flanked by Paradigm's award-winning ADP speakers and a more powerful (but still compact) subwoofer. Cinema ADPs add reverberant surround sound for a supremely realistic music and multichannel soundstage.

Finally, there's the brand new Cinema 110 CT, which forms a matched LCR system by using three larger speakers (identical in size, driver configuration, and, hence, identical specification) to optimize timbral accuracy across the front of your home theater or music listening room. The company's popular ADP surround speakers are also part of this package.

As far as audiophile quality goes, we know that you've learned not to expect much from the speakers in a conventional home-theater-in-a-box system. But the "sub" in subwoofer doesn't have to mean "sub par." The powerful new compact Cinema CT v.3 subwoofers meet the same standards as all of Paradigm's award-winning subwoofers, offering tremendous output, superb control, and clean, articulate bass. The subwoofers also feature patented built-in, high-power, discrete amplifiers that provide exceptional high-current, low-distortion power.

Designed with a compact profile, Cinema CTs will fit into any living space and blend with any décor. They're also very lightweight for easy maneuverability and installation. The

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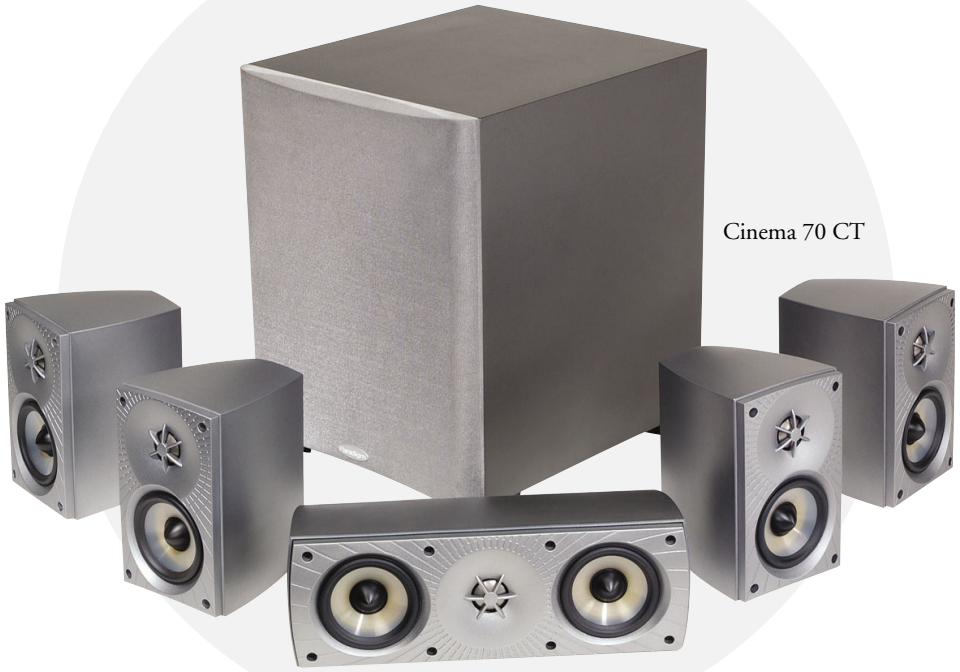

Cinema 70 CT

result? Shockingly high sound quality with aesthetics to match, at a price that's truly affordable.

Cinema CT Model Introduction Breakdown

Cinema 70 CT System

- Four Cinema 70 speakers: 3.5-inch bass/midrange driver, 1-inch high-frequency driver
- One Cinema CC speaker: two 3.5-inch bass/midrange drivers, 1-inch high-frequency driver
- One Cinema 70 CT Subwoofer: 8-inch driver, 100W RMS/250W Peak
- Available finishes include silver, white, and black
- MSRP: $499

Cinema 90 CT System

- Two Cinema 90 speakers: 4.5-inch bass/midrange driver, 1-inch high-frequency driver
- One Cinema CC speaker: two 3.5-inch bass/midrange drivers, 1-inch high-frequency driver
- Two Cinema ADP speakers: two 3.5-inch bass/midrange drivers, two 1-inch high frequency driver
- One Cinema 90 CT Subwoofer: 10-inch driver, 120W RMS/360W Peak
- Available finishes include silver, white, and black
- MSRP: $649

Cinema 110 CT System

- Two Cinema 110 L/R speakers: two 4.5-inch bass/midrange drivers, 1-inch high-frequency driver
- One Cinema 110 C speaker: two 4.5-inch bass/midrange drivers, 1-inch high-frequency driver
- Two Cinema ADP speakers: two 3.5-inch bass/midrange drivers, two 1-inch high-frequency drivers
- One Cinema 110 CT Subwoofer: 10-inch driver, 150W RMS/450W Peak
- Available finishes include silver, white, and black
- MSRP: $799

Paradigm®

THE ULTIMATE IN SOUND FOR MUSIC AND HOME THEATER™

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Optoma MovieTime DV10
Available June; MSRP: $1,495
www.optomausa.com

Bring Home Theater To The Masses

Optoma Technology's new MovieTime DV10 is a digital home theater projector that features ultra bright, cinema-quality projection, a built-in DVD player, and high-performance speakers in a stylish, compact design. Movie enthusiasts can now enjoy video and sound in their homes instantly without the complexities and price usually associated with home-theater solutions.

This pure digital DVD projector is preset from the DVD to the projected image, resulting in optimized DVD viewing with guaranteed color accuracy and distortion-free pictures.

Other Optoma MovieTime DV10 Features

The new MovieTime digital DVD projector is designed for a wide range of home entertainment, whether it's viewing the latest cinema titles or watching home movies with friends and family. The DV10 includes an integrated digital DVD player, two 5-Watt speakers, and a short throw lens. MovieTime features DLP (Digital Light Processing) technology from Texas Instruments and provides a direct digital signal from the DVD to the

Advertisement

projector, producing accurate color and details for a rich home theater experience. It offers HDTV compatibility for high-definition entertainment from a variety of sources and an optimized setting display for true wide-screen cinema-quality performance. The DV10 also offers optical audio output, which is ideal for rich and engulfing Dolby and DTS home theater surround sound. The sound system can also be connected to an external audio system to give listeners a full 5.1-channel surround-sound experience.

MovieTime is also compatible with other sources such as gaming consoles, VCRs, and PCs. It projects an eight-foot image from less than nine feet with superb image and sound quality.

Optoma
The DLP™ Display Expert

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Optoma H57
MSRP: $4,995
www.optomausa.com

H57 Professional Native Widescreen Digital Cinema

Optoma's native widescreen H57 features DarkChip2 technology from Texas Instruments.

The H57 outperforms big-ticket competitors with superior picture quality, a black level of 3000:1, and super-quiet operation on 28dB (decibels).

Fully compatible with every digital and analog source, the H57 has DVI-HDCP/HDMI (Digital Video Interactive-high-bandwidth digital content protection/high-definition multimedia interface), Component (RCA), S-Video, composite video, and RS232 communication.

Features Include:

- True 576-pixel resolution with UXGA (Ultra Extended Graphics Array)

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- 1100-lumen rating with 3000:1 high-contrast ratio
- Revolutionary shield design reduces light leakage and is whisper quiet at 28dB
- Industry-leading video processing and independently adjustable color matrix
- Convenient DVI-HDCP, VGA, component (RCA), composite, and S-Video, RS232 input
- Minimum throw ratio of 1.57:1
- Adjustable cooling fan speed settings for higher altitudes
- Two-year warranty

Optoma
The DLP™ Display Expert

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Optoma H79
MSRP: $9,999
www.optomausa.com

H79 DarkChip3 DLP Widescreen Home Theater Projector

The Optoma H79 home theater projector surpasses the quality of some of the best analog projectors at a fraction of the price, providing the most vivid, clear, and immersive digital video experience possible. The H79 DarkChip3 DLP (Digital Light Processing) technology delivers a wider and smoother color palette with virtually no dithering in the lower end of the gray scale, as well as providing an incredibly rich brightness to win over even the most discerning of home theater aficionados.

Features Include:

- Advanced DarkChip3 DLP Technology
- HDTV native for viewing widescreen TV signals

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- Expanded connectivity includes DVI-I (Digital Visual Interface), BNC, component and S-Video hookups
- 4500:1 contrast ratio-twice that of a professional theater-delivers subtle color details
- Bright, 1000-lumen rating
- Lamp life of 3,000 hours, while operating at a quiet 23 decibels
- 5x, eight-segment DVE (dark video enhancement) color wheel technology with additional dark segments
- Two-year warranty

Optoma
The DLP™ Display Expert

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Escient FireBall DVDM-300
MSRP: $4,999
www.escient.com

New Escient FireBall DVDM-300

The FireBall DVDM-300 merges Escient's music management system with its DVD movie management system into a single home media server.

Enjoy Every Movie In Your Collection At The Touch Of A Button

With the DVDM-300, users can manage, control, and access more than 1,200 DVDs stored and protected in up to three external Sony or Kenwood CD/DVD changers. To manage such a vast collection, the DVDM-300 utilizes Escient's patented automatic transport and identification technologies, as well as CD-recognition technology from Gracenote, to instantly find and play the desired disc stored in a connected changer. In addition, the DVDM-300 accesses Escient's world-renowned MovieDB DVD database to provide users with an integrated movie guide that automatically displays titles, cast information, ratings, running time, and cover art for every movie in your collection.

With a 300GB internal hard drive and the ability to manage up to 1,200 external CDs, the new Escient FireBall DVDM-300 can store and catalog even the largest music collections. It is now possible to store over 850 hours of true CD-quality music using the new FLAC (Free Lossless Audio Codec) encoder or over 5,000 hours of MP3 music (depending on compression rate). In addition, with built-in file-sharing services, consumers can easily transfer music files between the DVDM-300 and their PC or Mac, allowing music library backups and music file importing. The file-sharing services also allow users to stream and listen to audio files directly from their FireBall to a computer on the same network.

Music

Like all Escient FireBall music management products, the DVDM-300 features a built-in CD-RW that lets users rip CDs directly to the internal hard drive. The CD-RW drive also

Advertisement

allows users to burn customized mix CDs based on user-created playlists. Thanks to the new optimized FLAC encoder, the DVDM-300 provides true CD-quality recording (eliminating the loss of information inherent to conventional MP3 compression), while using much less disk space when compared to the original CD. In addition, the improved DVDM-300 user interface improves the entire recording process, allowing automated recording from the internal drive and connected external CD changers.

Easy Setup & Integration

The FireBall DVDM-300's built-in 10/100 Ethernet connector allows easy connection to a variety of in-home, wired, or wireless networks. Once connected, users can stream files across the home network, as well as back up files from the FireBall. Furthermore, with the integrated Web server, a DVDM-300 can be controlled from any PC or Mac on the network using the Escient EWP-2000 wireless touch panel or an HTML-compatible browser (Internet Explorer or Safari) from a PC or Mac.

Easily installed in as little as 15 minutes, the FireBall DVDM-300 ships with Quick Set-Up instructions that show several connection options. Free third-party external control modules for advanced custom installations are available on the Escient Web site.

ESCIENT®

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New Konica Minolta 8MP Digital SLR (Single Lens Reflex) Camera: The DiMAGE A200

Konica Minolta DiMAGE A200
MSRP: $799
www.konicaminolta.us

The new high-performance 8MP DiMAGE A200 provides superb image quality and features Konica Minolta's Anti-Shake technology, unique new Vari-Angle LCD monitor, and built-in 7X optical zoom lens.

Product Highlights

Vari-Angle LCD Monitor: The 1.8-inch TFT LCD monitor rotates 270 degrees vertically and 180 degrees horizontally, allowing photographers to hold the camera in a comfortable position at high- and low-angle shots while still viewing the LCD straight on. And, because photographers can view the LCD while they get in just the right position for a self-portrait, the DiMAGE A200 is great for taking shots from a variety of different angles.

Included Wireless Remote Control: Photographers can take self-portraits using the camera's remote control. They can also connect the DiMAGE A200 to a TV and control the images with the remote control. This allows users to sit back and enjoy the pictures and movies they took that same day.

Digital Zoom: The 4X digital zoom gives up to a 28X total zoom when combined with the optical zoom, providing a maximum focal length of 800mm, which is perfect for distance shots or sporting events. And, even shots at a focal length of 800mm are free of jerky movements thanks to Konica Minolta's Anti-Shake technology. Photographers can choose from two digital zoom modes: image interpolation digital zoom (in which the number of pixels doesn't change) and normal mode (cropped into 2MP). The digital zoom can also be accessed from any point of the optical zoom using the handy digital zoom lever on the rear panel.

High-Quality Movie Recording: The DiMAGE A200 incorporates a true VGA (Video Graphics Array) movie (640 x 480 pixels) mode. This allows users to record high-quality movies at 30 fps, rivaling images seen on TV. Users can also take high-quality SVGA (Super VGA; 800 x 600 pixels) movies at 15 fps,

Advertisement

which look good even on a large PC monitor. The DiMAGE A200 lets photographers use both the digital and optical zoom when recording movies, allowing them to capture images at a maximum focal length of 800mm (35mm equivalent). And, the Night Movie function makes subjects highly visible even in dark settings. The DiMAGE A200 also comes bundled with fun-to-use video software, Video Studio 8 SE by ULEAD, which lets users import and edit images and then output them to video CDs.

Sure-Grip, Ergonomic: Despite its professional-level picture quality and features, the Konica Minolta DiMAGE A200 is compact and weighs just 17.8 ounces, making it easy to take on vacations and day trips. And although it's small, the DiMAGE A200's grip makes it easy to hold when taking pictures.

Various AF (Auto Focus) Mode: Wide Focus Area mode informs photographers of focused points by flashing them when the shutter is pressed halfway down. Predictive Focus Control keeps moving subjects in focus. 11-Point Focus Area is perfect for switching the AF point instantaneously on the main positions in the frame. Flex Focus Point is perfect for higher-precision auto focusing. These features are very effective for capturing action in unusual lighting.

Ultra High-Speed Continuous Shooting: When photographers really need to fire off as many shots as possible in a limited amount of time, select the UHS (Ultra High Speed) mode on the menu to set the camera to capture images at a continuous advance of 40 frames at 10 fps. For convenience, these images can be captured in VGA format.

KONICA MINOLTA

Advertisement

iriver H10
MSRP: $279.99
www.iriveramerica.com

iriver H10 Player Sets New Standards For Features, Ease Of Use & Music Service Compatibility

The H10 player is the newest member of the iriver music player family, with a more intuitive user experience, color display, swappable battery, and touch strip control. The stylish new 5GB players come in four colors (Lounge Gray, Remix Blue, Trance Red, and Triple Platinum) and offer vivid, color screens for viewing photos.

The H10 is designed to be PlaysForSure-verified out of the box, and it works seamlessly with Windows Media Player 10, including support for Auto Sync to sync your music, photos, and playlists. With the H10, you can choose from a growing number of PlaysForSure download and subscription stores, such as FYE (For Your Entertainment), MSN Music, Musicmatch, MusicNow, Napster, and Wal-Mart Music Downloads.

The H10 also supports innovative, online, portable subscription services, such as Napster's Napster To Go, to provide customers an array of music, news, business, and entertainment audio content.

The iriver H10 plays up to 150 hours of digital music and includes a rechargeable and replaceable battery, integrated voice recorder, and a digital FM tuner with FM recording capabilities. The players come bundled with iriver earphones, a

Advertisement

quality carrying case, installation software CD, AC adapter, USB 2.0 cable, an interface cable, and a printed users manual.

iriver H10 5GB Features:

- Plays up to 150 hours of digital music
- 5GB of internal storage
- Vivid, color display
- Ultra-intuitive interface with convenient touch strip
- Displays digital photos
- Slim, lightweight design
- PlaysForSure-enabled
- Supports portable subscription service Napster To Go
- Rechargeable, removable battery lasts up to 12 hours
- Built-in FM tuner and FM recorder
- Integrated voice recorder
- Ultra-fast USB 2.0 transfers
- Supports MP3, WMA, JPEG, and TXT files
- Enhanced 3D audio
- Dimensions: 3.8 inches high x 2.2 inches wide x 0.6 inches deep
- Weight: 3.4 ounces

iriver™

Advertisement

Salamander Designs Synergy Quad
Available May 1; MSRP: starts at $899
www.salamanderdesigns.com

Synergy Quad From Salamander Designs Wide-Screen Panel TV Platform

Salamander Designs has added a new unit, the Quad, to its Synergy modular furniture series.

The Quad is a full 87 inches wide, more than four times the width of the Synergy Single module. Its substantial span, and the fact that it accepts the company's Flat Panel Mount, makes it ideal for supporting flat-panel TV displays with screens up to 61 inches wide and DLP (digital light processing) TVs as wide as 80 inches.

The four-cabinet sections beneath the Quad's sturdy top shelf contain ample room for related electronic entertainment components. Moveable shelf pegs, which fit into support-post grooves, slide vertically and then lock at any height, making interior shelves infinitely adjustable. Rear cabinet panels leave openings for cables and provide component ventilation.

Like sibling modules in the Salamander Designs Synergy furniture series, buyers can customize Quads at the time of purchase. Three genuine hardwood finishes (cherry, maple, and walnut) are available in addition to black, and the anodized aluminum support posts, which add substantial strength to the units, come in matte silver or anodized black.

While most users purchase doors and side panels for their Synergy units, others leave the shelves and support posts exposed. Open or enclosed, Quads are easily fitted with various Synergy accessories. The many options include wheels or custom feet, drawers, double-width interior shelves, glass shelves, lighting, and integrated door locks, to name just a few.

The Synergy Quad is available in three different heights (12 inches, 21 inches, and 31 inches), and Salamander Designs offers options for extending them upward. This allows purchasers to create elegant wall units.

SalamanderDesigns

Advertisement

Salamander Designs Olivia
MSRP: Starts at $2,000
www.salamanderdesigns.com

Salamander Designs Broadens Its Line Of Theater Chairs With The Olivia

Salamander Designs has added a new model, the Olivia, to its theater seating line.

The Olivia is generously proportioned and provides an extremely comfortable, oversized seating surface that measures 26 inches wide x 24 inches deep. Quilted leather surfaces cover both the base and sides while the seat cushion, back, and armrests are covered in a plush, suede-like microfiber.

Customers are invited to customize their Olivias. They have a choice of 14 leather finishes: Eclipse Black, Mora, Ruby, Ocean, Hunter Green, Green Tea, Streetlight, Sunrise, Yellow, Sea, Chocolate, Mineral, Harvest, and Tudor. Nine different colors are available for the chair's suede-like surfaces, including Stone, Espresso, Moss, Putty, Sage, Aqua, Cherry, Brandy, and Bone.

The Olivia is available in all leather or leather and microsuede combinations starting at a manufacturer's suggested retail price of $2,000.

To allow customers maximum flexibility, Salamander Designs is offering various versions of the Olivia, which is available as a standard recline chair and also as a powered recliner. A matching ottoman is available, as well. It has a built-in storage compartment and it rolls easily on hidden wheels.

Placing the ottoman against the front edge of a fixed-back Olivia, in effect, converts the chair to a chaise lounge.

In keeping with its modular furniture philosophy, the company also provides left-arm-only, right-arm-only, armless, and corner-module Olivias. These, in conjunction with special connector pieces, combine in various ways to let users create straight theater rows of chairs, an Olivia loveseat or an Olivia sofa, and even an L-shaped Olivia arrangement similar to that of conventional sectional sofas.

For those who prefer it to a corner seat in an L-shaped arrangement, Salamander Designs offers a matching Olivia corner console table.

For additional convenience, the Olivia has storage compartments in each arm, and a cup holder is built into each arm, as well. Every Olivia also includes a removable lumbar pillow covered in suede-like microfiber.

SalamanderDesigns

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consumer electronics

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Jerry Bruckheimer
Producer

Chart a course for extreme brightness and high resolution with JVC's HD-ILA TV, powered by 3-Chip D-ILA. Featuring amazing picture quality and incredible sound, JVC's D-ILA (Direct Drive Image Light Amplifier) TV is designed to change the way you experience television. If you've been on a treasure hunt seeking both style and state-of-the-art in one cool, thin package, look no further – your search is over. But beware: with JVC's HD-ILA TV you just might actually feel as though there are pirates in your living room.

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music & movies

music

BY LIZ DIXON

Tori Amos

"The Beekeeper" • $18.98
Progression is necessary to stay fresh and successful in the music biz. Tori Amos burst onto the scene in 1991 with "Little Earthquakes" but arguably got stuck in an artistic rut with a couple of her intermediate, somewhat disparaging albums. She seems to have come full circle with "The Beekeeper," her newest addition. It is innovative and intensely thoughtful, and while some critics of her previous albums may have implied that she had reached a creative plateau, "The Beekeeper" demonstrates a newfound level of maturity and creativity we hadn't seen in her prior work.

Amos has really hit her musical mark with this one. "Ribbons Undone" says it best: "It is her time/Watch her run." She seems to have come to terms with her quirkiness and has embraced this evolution of her lyrics and musical style.

"Life seems to go on **without effort**, when I am filled with music."

—George Eliot

Regina Spektor

"Soviet Kitsch" • $15.98
If you dig the tone of Tori Amos, you might also appreciate up-and-coming solo gig Regina Spektor. This girl shows her graceful talent on the piano, but with a brash, Ani DiFranco-esque style. The mixture of her elegant piano playing with her somewhat harsh, bitter lyrics reveals the heartfelt sentiment in this album.

Jack Johnson

"In Between Dreams" • $13.98
Maybe Jack Johnson's ability to take listeners to another time and place has to do with his surfing background, as his newest feel-good album offers a retreat into his bubbly world. Well, the ocean isn't the only thing he's in tune with. Still, after listening, we're left wondering: How do you tell the difference between this guy and John Mayer anyway?

Moby

"Hotel" • $18.98
Even those who may not have previously enjoyed Moby's electronica sound may want to check out this album. Guest vocalist Laura Dawn gives this go-around a more mellow sound than Moby's other albums. For those who prefer his old, eclectic style, don't worry: The album is still funky enough to keep you involved.

The Decemberists

"Picaresque" • $16.98
Singer/guitarist Colin Meloy truly shines on this, the Decemberists' third fanciful, full-length album. The band teams up with producer Chris Walla (Death Cab for Cutie), offering a cornucopia of noteworthy, indie eccentricity. The lyrics instigate literary-type brewing, with the music flawlessly backing up their storytelling mastery.

BY SAMIT G. CHOUDHURI

"Bridget Jones: The Edge Of Reason"

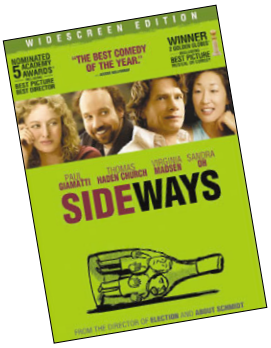
$29.95

Fans of author Helen Fielding's "Bridget Jones's Diary" or viewers of the thoroughly enjoyable 2001 film of the same name will need little introduction to Bridget Jones. Bridget is that cute, lovable, bumbling friend who always got herself into trouble, and no matter how irritating she was, she left you with that "awwww" feeling. Renée Zellweger, back in the title role, is rumored to have upsized from a dress size of 6 to 14 for her role (now that's dedication!), and leading men Colin Firth and Hugh Grant reprise their original roles. The sequel is mostly a series of comedic events that loses the original's cohesive quest for true love and tongue-in-cheek urgency. It's a good laugh, but much more forgettable.

"Finding Neverland"

$29.95

Director Marc Forster of "Monster's Ball" brings playwright J. M. Barrie's (the man who introduced the world to Peter Pan) life to the big screen with an innocent and rather touching sweep of his directorial hand. Johnny Depp turns in yet another superb performance as the gentle Barrie, and Kate Winslet steps up as Sylvia Llewelyn Davies, the widow whose orphans would later inspire Barrie for the work he would forever be remembered by. "Finding Neverland" is a gentle gem of a film that was nominated for seven Academy Awards.



"Sideways"

$29.95

It's not often we get to offer up a director from our local area (Omaha, Neb.), but Alexander Payne is more than up to the task in the middle-aged-men-coming-of-age film. Paul Giamatti (Miles, a middle-school teacher feeling very much down on his luck) and Thomas Haden Church (Jack, a washed-up actor on the verge of marriage) road trip to California wine country in that rare buddy flick that both sexes can enjoy equally. The pair run into Virginia Madsen's Maya—a woman who sees through Miles' insecurities and communicates with him in a most sweet and tender way. This intelligent, bittersweet drama is a mix of tragedy and comedy that's liberally sprinkled with hope.

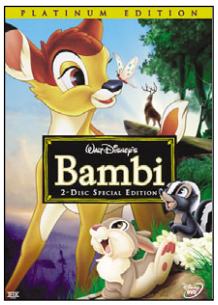
"The Incredibles" (2-Disc Collector's Edition)

$29.95

Pixar (the genius behind "Finding Nemo" and "Toy Story," among others) brings in another hit by calling on the writing and directorial skills of Brad Bird (the talent behind the superb yet quite underrated "The Iron Giant"). What would happen if you took two hot, young superheroes, married them, and threw them into the future as middle-aged parents who have put their heroic days behind them to raise a family? You end up with a story that strikes a chord with the whole family and is something you can laugh at and enjoy together. After 15 years, dad has a much wider waistline, mum's gotten bigger in the hips, and they have two children with some obvious superhero genetics at a time when superhero shenanigans are illegal. And wouldn't you know it—the world is in danger yet again. It's a good thing superhero costumes stretch to fit. This is A-List family entertainment.

"Bambi" (Platinum 2-Disc Special Edition)

$29.95



Disney's classic cartoon tearjerker has been digitally remastered and restored. This is the best "Bambi" has looked and sounded since its theatrical debut in 1942. In addition to the new 5.1 Disney Enhanced Home Theater Mix, the disc includes the original mono mix for purists. If your child has not been exposed to death, you may wish to watch this film with her the first time. Who among us can say they didn't cry when Bambi's mother was killed by the hunters? Some of us still shed a flow of tears. Ultimately, "Bambi" is a sweet children's classic that shows one baby deer's growth into adulthood with ample comic relief from a wacky rabbit (Thumper) and darling skunk (Flower). Kids will also enjoy some of the extra bonus content targeted specifically at them. Last but not least, Disney has a habit of pulling movies from the market after a certain period of time, so don't wait if you're interested. Pick the film up along with a box of tissues.

other notable releases

"The River" (The Criterion Collection): This is a 1951 art film of substance by Jean Renoir that's about three English girls who live along a river bank in Bengal during postwar India. The timeless metaphors presented through Renoir's deliciously exotic camerawork will transport you to a bygone era.

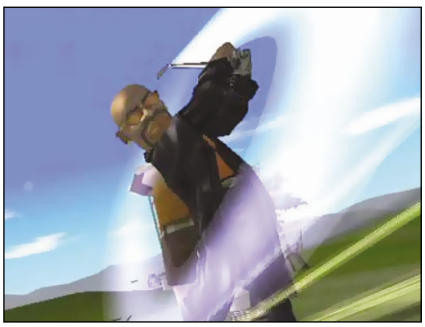
"Ladder 49": This is not your typical action fare and feels almost like an homage to the good work done by your local working-class heroes. These folks risk their lives every day to keep us safe (and Joaquin Phoenix and John Travolta pull off their respective roles as the newbie and veteran firefighters with aplomb).

games . . .

for you and the people in your life

BY VINCE COGLEY

PlayStation Portable



Hot Shots Golf

Golf doesn't have to revolve around constant scowling and wrapping your 7-iron around the nearest tree, and Sony's Hot Shots Golf is convincing proof. New character customization abilities let you create your own duffer from scratch with over 50 customizable body parts, accessories, golf clubs, and balls. Although the game's characters have a comical feel, the real-world golf physics ensure the gameplay is as serious as Tiger Woods on the 18th green.

ESRB Rating: Rating Pending
$49.99
Sony Computer
Entertain America
www.us.playstation.com

Gran Turismo 4 Mobile

When your two-hour commute through rush hour traffic leaves you frazzled, Sony's Gran Turismo 4 Mobile can be the perfect stress reliever. Director Kazunori Yamauchi has said the PlayStation Portable version of the popular racing game's fourth installment should transition seamlessly from the PlayStation 2 version. With more than 700 vehicles ranging from a 1965 Fiat 500F to a 2005 Ford GT, you'll have plenty of opportunities to exercise your lead foot.

ESRB Rating: Rating Pending
$49.99
Sony Computer
Entertainment America
www.us.playstation.com

Nintendo DS

Yoshi Touch & Go

Nintendo's favorite green dinosaur and Italian plumber (albeit an infant version of the mustachioed hero) return for an adventure on the Nintendo DS. Yoshi Touch & Go takes full advantage of the DS's stylus in two intuitive ways. In vertical-action levels, use the stylus to shield Baby Mario from enemies and guide him to Yoshi. On horizontal-scrolling levels, the stylus helps Yoshi avoid obstacles as he tromps over various terrains.

ESRB Rating: (E)veryone
$34.99
Nintendo
www.nintendo.com

Multiplatform

LEGO: Star Wars

A synthesis of one of the most popular toy franchises with one of the most popular movie franchises, Eidos Interactive's LEGO: Star Wars lets you relive adventures from "The Phantom Menace," "Attack of the Clones," and the upcoming "Revenge of the Sith." LEGO: Star Wars might be a kinder, gentler way to introduce young fans to the Star Wars series, instead of Star Wars games geared toward more mature gamers.

ESRB Rating: (E)veryone
Varies
Eidos Interactive
www.legostarwarsthevideogame.com

Ceiva 2 Digital Photo Receiver

For some family members we know, half the reason to own a computer is to get the latest photos of the grandkids. This handy digital photo frame solves that issue, to some extent. The Ceiva 2 Digital Photo Receiver ($149.95 plus $6.95/month subscription fee; www.ceiva.com) uses a phone line to automatically download up to 30 new photos from a server each night, securely and without long-distance charges or interruptions to the phone service. You may invite family members to send pics to the server via PC, or you can beam them directly into the Ceiva from a camera phone using the new CEIVAMobile feature. Unfortunately, there's currently no way for users to save or print photos from the Ceiva, which seems like a major omission. Anyway, the unit's LCD is 5 x 7 inches, but a much larger 15-inch Ceiva with wireless capabilities should appear this year.

Samsonite Park Avenue Nylon Business Case

If you'd rather leave your significant other behind than your notebook computer, make sure you treat that laptop right in transit. Samsonite's Park Avenue (us.samsonite.com) is a combination notebook case and travel bag the size of a large purse. It's available in soft nylon ($120) or leather ($250) in black, silver, and red. There's room for a 17-inch notebook inside, but a movable partition lets you resize the padded chamber to smaller models. A waterproof flap provides reasonable rain protection, while pockets and pouches offer loads of storage for documents, cables, and a cell phone. Speaking of phones, that's probably your boyfriend calling now to whine, "Wait uuuuuup."

TikiMac Big Tiki Drive

Put on your PVC grass skirt, pick up your discount store ukelele, and start speaking pidgin Polynesian! It's time to add another bit of faux South Pacific culture to your life with the Big Tiki Drive (kahuna.tikimac.com). At nearly 4 inches tall, this USB 2.0 flash drive cuts an imposing figure, at least compared to lesser USB drives. The Big Tiki comes with a glowing cable that simulates fiery lava behind its wrathful eyes. The gods have made him compatible with Mac OS 9.1 and later, OS X 10.1.2 and up, and Windows 2000/Me/XP. For as little as $59 (256MB), plus the cost of a pet tarantula, you can scare off that pesky Brady Bunch any time they come around.

. . . & gifts

on the lighter side of technology

BY MARTY SEMS

Retro

Evolution Of Portable Audio Players

1979 Sony TPS-L2

The first device to let people take their own music with them wherever they went was the original Sony Walkman, model TPS-L2. It cost $200, weighed 14 ounces, and was not much larger than the audio cassette it played. Consumers loved it, and competitors followed Sony's example.

1984 Sony D-50

As CD popularity continued to grow, Sony introduced its first portable CD player—the model D-50. It was the size of a CD case, cost $299, and helped boost CD sales. The D-50 evolved into the Discman.

1992 Sony MZ-1

Sony introduced the MiniDisc, and its first portable MiniDisc player was the model MZ-1. The MD was a new digital audio disc that competed with the audio cassette. It was a magneto-optical disc with a 2.5-inch diameter. Competitive portable DCC players arrived in 1993.

1990 Sony TCD-D3

Despite the popularity of the CD, the evolution of the audio cassette continued with DAT (Digital Audio Tape) technology and, in 1992, the competitive Digital Compact Cassette. Audiophiles said DAT sounded as good as CD. Sony introduced its first DAT Walkman, the TCD-D3, in 1990 for $850.

1998 Diamond Rio PMP300

Diamond Multimedia created the market for fill-it-yourself portable digital audio players with the introduction of the Rio PMP300. For under $200, it was one of the first portable digital audio players to store music in internal flash memory (32MB) and to use MP3 digital audio technology.

scope

2000 Creative Nomad Jukebox

Creative Labs was the first well-known maker of portable digital audio players to integrate a hard drive in the device. The Nomad Jukebox had a 6GB hard drive that could store more than 100 hours of music. It cost $499.99.

2001 Apple iPod

The iconic iPod debuted at $399 with a 5GB hard drive and a super-fast FireWire port, which let you transfer 1,000 songs to the iPod from a PC in less than 10 minutes. Later models featured hard drive sizes ranging from 10GB to 60GB.

Courtesy of Apple

2004 Lexar JumpGear-MP3

Last year, Lexar introduced the first portable digital audio player to play content from a removable USB flash drive. The JumpGear-MP3 works with Lexar's JumpDrive Sport and comes in two configurations: as a standalone for $49.99 or with a 64MB JumpDrive Sport for $89.99.

2005 Apple iPod Shuffle

This year, Apple introduced the iPod Shuffle. At $99 for a 512MB version or $149 for a 1GB version, it is the lowest capacity and least-expensive product in the iPod line. The iPod Shuffle weighs as little as a car key, and you can connect it to your computer using a USB port.

Courtesy of Apple

Audio On The Go

What's coming next in the evolution of portable audio players? In the second half of this year, we expect to see integration with wireless networking technology, such as Bluetooth or Wi-Fi, so you can use wireless headsets or connect wirelessly to a computer.

BY ROBERT E. CALEM

exit

Patio CE

Even though spring is two months old, May signals the beginning of genuinely good weather. And how better to celebrate this yearly awakening than with an outdoor fete with friends and family? Stay connected while keeping your belly full and your party going until the wee hours of the morning.

Robomow

The outdoor equivalent of iRobot's Roomba lets you mow from your hammock.

www.smarthome.com

Market Umbrella

This functional and environmentally friendly umbrella keeps the light off you during the day and on you at night.

www.intheswim.com

Bose FreeSpace 51 speakers

Keep your guests' toes tapping outside all day and all night with these crowd pleasers.

www.bose.co.uk

Talking Remote Thermometer

This award-winning, two-piece system keeps you mingling with your guests while your food is grilled to perfection.

www.brookstone.com

Digital Barbecue Recipe Guide

From pizza to poultry, this griller's must-have will make you a barbecuing Betty Crocker.

www.brookstone.com

Binoculars

May is the best time of year to see the star Antares. Capture its burgundy beauty with these camera binoculars.

www.brookstone.com

Electric Patio Caddie

Turn even a small patio into a barbecuing haven with this small but mighty grill.

www.grilllovers.com

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At first look you are awestruck by the beauty of Sanus Component Furniture. And when you investigate deeper you see the strength of aluminum pillars blended with the character of solid hardwoods and unique features like tempered glass shelves and a wire management system. Component Furniture includes cabinets, armoires and digital TV stands that configure to your exact needs. Add the Sanus Convection Cooling System that allows air to flow around heat-generating A/V gear like a cooling canyon breeze and you have Component Furniture that echoes of quality and performance.

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